

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 406 861

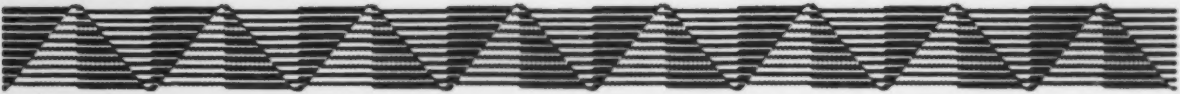
FL 801 147

AUTHOR Strunk, Sandra J.; Fowler-Frey, Jaclyn
TITLE ESL Online Action Research. Final Report.
INSTITUTION Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education.;
Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13, Lancaster, Pa.
SPONS AGENCY Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 71p.
CONTRACT 98-6008
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Action Research; *Adult Basic Education; *Classroom
Research; Computer Networks; Computer Uses in Education;
*English (Second Language); Information Dissemination;
Inservice Teacher Education; *Internet; *Literacy Education;
Peer Relationship; *Professional Development
IDENTIFIERS Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT

The report describes a project designed to meet professional development needs of Pennsylvania's practitioners in adult basic and literacy education by: (1) creating an infrastructure for guiding practitioners through classroom research with support from colleagues; and (2) linking practitioners through telecommunications. The project allowed ten English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) educators to participate in action research with colleagues using the Internet as the primary communication vehicle, and coordinated with the National Professional Development Network for participation in an online action research database. As they pursued their projects, participants communicated regularly with a participant-partner and joined in a virtual meeting online once a month. It is concluded that online action research holds great potential for ongoing professional development of adult educators, by creating a sense of community among practitioners, exposing them to a wealth of information in their field, and giving them a systematic way to examine practice. The report details the project's origins, design, and results relating to four themes: communicating with a partner; using technology in a new way; becoming a researcher; and unexpected outcomes. Appended materials include the training outline and summaries of seven research projects. Contains 22 references. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *



Final Report

ESL Online Action Research

A Collaborative Venture
between
The ESL Program Division of the
Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education
and
Lancaster Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13's
Adult Education Program

Contract Number: 98-6008
Project Year: 1995-96

Written by:
Sandra J. Strunk, Project Coordinator
Jaclyn Fowler-Frey, Project Facilitator

Grantee:
Lancaster Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13
Adult Education Program
1 Cumberland Street
Lebanon, PA 17042
(717) 270 - 2935

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Cheryl Keenan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to
improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this
document do not necessarily represent
official OERI position or policy.

The activity which is the subject of this report, was supported in part by the U.S. Department of Education. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U. S. Department of Education or the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

Abstract Page

Title: ESL Online Action Research Project

Project Number: CFDA #84.002

Funding: \$22,516

Project Director: Sandra J. Strunk

Phone No.: (717) 270 - 2935

Contact People: Sandra J. Strunk
Jaclyn Fowler-Frey

Phone No.: (717) 270 - 2935

(717) 270 - 2936

Agency Address: Lancaster Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13
1 Cumberland Street
Lebanon, PA 17042

Purpose: The purpose of the ESL Online Action Research Project was to help meet the professional development needs of Pennsylvania's ABLE professionals by:

- 1) creating an infrastructure for guiding practitioners through the process of practitioner research with support from colleagues in the field and
- 2) linking practitioners to a telecommunications venue through which they could interact with colleagues on a state, national, and/or international level.

The OAR project addressed two critically important issues in the professional development of Pennsylvania's Adult Basic Education (ABE) practitioners: practitioner isolation and the effective use of practice-based professional development. These are issues that greatly affect the field's practitioners--instructors, administrators, and volunteers--in any of the ABE subfields--English as a Second Language (ESL), General Education Development (GED), Adult Basic Education (ABE), and Literacy. Thus, although ESL practitioners were the focus of the 1995-1996 OAR project, the development, implementation, and evaluation of the project should be of critical interest to anyone in the field.

Procedures: This project allowed ten Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education (PAACE) ESL Program Division members to participate in action research projects with their colleagues using the Internet as a primary communication vehicle. Based upon the 1992-93 Online Action Research Project done by CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System), the project coordinated efforts with the National Professional Development Network (Pro-Net) in order to participate in a national online action research database. With the support of the project advisors, most of the project participants began to utilize the *inquiry spiral* in which critical reflection on one aspect of one's practice produces areas for further inquiry. The practitioners continued to use the practitioner research model even after the project came to an end. Moreover, as they pursued their projects, OAR participants were asked to communicate regularly with a participant-partner as well as to participate in monthly group meetings in a virtual meeting room on the Internet. They were thus becoming adept at using the Internet as a communications option, and, more importantly, they were regularly sharing with their colleagues in the field.

Summary of Findings: Online action research holds great promise as an avenue for ongoing professional development for adult educators. Not only does it help to create a sense of community among practitioners who, for a variety of reasons, have very little opportunity for regular collegial interaction, but it also exposes practitioners to a wealth of information about their field. Further, the practitioner research process gives adult educators a systematic way of examining their practice and making important decisions about day to day activities. The combination of practitioner research, Internet technology and collegial interaction creates a powerful professional development tool that adult education practitioners find exciting and insightful.

Products: ESL Online Action Research Final Report

Descriptors:

Introduction

Background.....	1
TimeFrame.....	4
Key Personnel.....	6
Dissemination.....	7

Body of Report

Statement of Problem.....	8
Goals and Objectives.....	12
Methods and Procedures.....	13
Objectives.....	16
Project Evaluation.....	22
Project Results.....	23
<i>Theme 1: Communicating with a Partner.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Theme 2: Using Technology in a New Way.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Theme 3: Becoming a Researcher.....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Theme 4: Unexpected Outcomes.....</i>	<i>38</i>

Recommendations.....	41
-----------------------------	-----------

Works Cited.....	43
-------------------------	-----------

Appendices

<i>Appendix A: Training Outline.....</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Appendix B: Project Summaries.....</i>	<i>52</i>

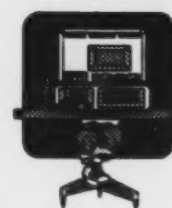
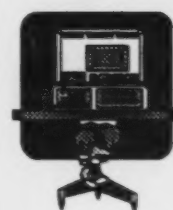


Table of Contents

The 1995-1996 ESL Online Action Research (OAR) Project administered by Lancaster Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13 (IU 13) in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education (PAACE) was modeled after the 1992-1993 OAR project conducted by CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System) with a grant from the National Institute for Literacy. In the initial CASAS project, six teams of adult educators throughout California were linked via a telecommunications network. Each team conducted an action research project on OTAN (Online Technical Assistance Network) by communicating periodically about a topic of shared interest and concern. As a result of this project, CASAS was able to link successful practitioner research to positive learner gains in the classroom.

A PAACE ESL Program Division member survey conducted in the spring of 1994 identified practitioner isolation as an issue of grave concern to Pennsylvania ESL practitioners. Because Pennsylvania is such a rural state, distance is a significant factor in collegial interaction among adult educators. This issue is further exacerbated by the part-time nature of adult ESL instruction and the large number of volunteer tutors providing services to adult language learners in Pennsylvania. Even when distance was not an issue, many practitioners reported time constraints as a barrier to participation in professional development activities. The 1995-1996 ESL Online Action Research project was designed to meet the professional development needs of adult basic and literacy education practitioners in Pennsylvania by linking them to a national telecommunications venue. Using this infrastructure, Pennsylvania practitioners were able to communicate with their colleagues on a state and national level, at any time of the day or night, thereby dramatically reducing practitioner isolation.

During the development stage and throughout the project, CASAS staff



Background

provided technical assistance, training materials, and online support. Participants were introduced to the *CASAS Action Research Database* where they could access practitioner research projects completed by adult educators around the country. The CASAS action research model was particularly helpful in facilitating practitioner research online.

The ESL Online Action Research project was also supported by regional professional development centers funded by the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education. All of the regional centers assisted with project recruitment and two centers provided participant stipends which allowed additional project participants. Working in tandem with CASAS, PAACE and the regional PDCs, this project was able to create an infrastructure for practitioners to obtain needed support throughout their first experiences with practitioner research. Further, this collaborative endeavor fostered communication with colleagues via the Internet and helped to overcome some of the barriers to effective professional development that have traditionally plagued adult basic education.

August 1995

The project began as information packets were sent to all eligible ABE programs in Pennsylvania. Interested practitioners were asked to fill out an application and return it to Lancaster Lebanon IU 13 by the end of September 1995. Regional professional development centers distributed information and contacted individuals who they thought might be interested.

September 1995

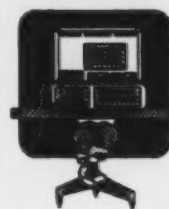
Applications were submitted to Lancaster Lebanon IU 13 by twenty-four applicants including administrators, teachers, and tutors from diverse geographic areas throughout Pennsylvania.

October 1995

Telephone interviews were conducted with each of the applicants to assess 1) their "fit" with the project; 2) their enthusiasm for the project; 3) their access to the necessary hardware (computer, modem, phone line); and 4) their geographic areas of practice. With so many interested applicants, the original objective of choosing three (3) teams of two (2) practitioners each was amended to encourage greater participation. Two (2) teams were added to the original objective for a total of five (5) teams of two (2) practitioners each. The Regional Professional Development Centers agreed to pay the stipends for the added participants from their respective regions.

December 1995

The ten (10) participants, the project director—Ms. Sandra J. Strunk, and the project trainer—Ms. Jaclyn M. Fowler-Frey—gathered at the Technology Center of Lancaster Lebanon IU 13 for a two-day training (see Appendix A). The first day of training focused on using technology. The participants were introduced to the Internet including how to access an Internet service,



Time Frame

Instruction included how to write, send, and receive e-mail, how to sign on to and correspond with participants of a listserv, and how to access research databases (ERIC, PsychLIT, etc.). Each of the project participants was assigned to a computer terminal to do some hands-on work on the Internet.

The second day of training was devoted to understanding the background, methods, and strategies for engaging in practitioner research. Participants were provided with the background and rationale behind the practitioner research method of professional development as well as a variety of models (practitioner inquiry, action research) from which to choose for their own project. In addition, the participants were guided in developing a research question, designing and carrying out qualitative and/or quantitative data collection methods, and implementing evaluation methods for critically assessing the data's relevance to their research questions.

January 1996 _____

Project participants began to determine their research questions and to conduct their individual practitioner research projects.

January - May 1996 _____

Participants were engaged in doing their individual projects including data collection and evaluation. Participants also communicated regularly with their research partners and the project advisors via the Internet. All participants were asked to take part in monthly full-group chats via the Internet. In May, three project participants shared their experiences and findings in a session at the Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE) conference.

June 1996 _____

Final participant reports were due to Lancaster Lebanon IU 13.

Sandra J. Strunk, Coordinator, SEPDC

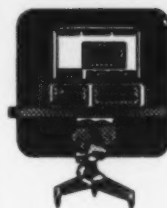
Ms. Strunk was responsible for coordinating all facets of the 1995-1996 Online Action Research Project including tailoring the original CASAS project to fit the needs of Pennsylvania's ABE practitioners. Ms. Strunk is an Adult Education Specialist with Lancaster Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13. She currently serves as Coordinator for the Southeast Professional Development Center (SEPDC) and Second Vice President of PAACE.

Ms. Strunk was instrumental in the recruitment and selection of project participants, as well as assisting project participants in the development, implementation, and evaluation of their individual projects.

Jaclyn M. Fowler-Frey, Professional Developer, SEPDC

Ms. Fowler-Frey acted as the project facilitator for the OAR project. Ms. Fowler-Frey is the Professional Developer for the Southeast Professional Development Center (SEPDC) for Lancaster Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13 and a member of the ESL Program Division of PAACE. She is also a Doctoral candidate in Adult Education at The Pennsylvania State University.

Ms. Fowler-Frey was involved in all aspects of the training, acted as a research resource for the project participants, and coauthored the ESL Online Action Research Final Report.

**Key Personnel**

This report is intended for adult basic and literacy education practitioners who are involved in professional development activities. Additional copies of this report may be obtained from:

**The Southeast Professional Development Center
Lancaster Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13**

1 Cumberland Street
Lebanon, PA 17042
(717) 270 - 2935
sepdcl@aol.com

AdvancE

PA Department of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

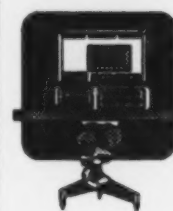
Individual participant reports are not only available as part of this report, but will also be made available through the CASAS Online Action Research Database. Information about this database can be obtained by contacting CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System) at the following address:

CASAS
8910 Clairemont Mesa Boulevard
San Diego, CA 92123-1104
(619) 292 - 2900
oarcasas@connecting.com

Project findings will be presented this year (1996) at the following adult education conferences:

Commission on Adult Basic Education
May 14 - 18, 1996
Pittsburgh, PA

Eastern Adult, Continuing, and Distance Education Research Conference
Penn State University
October 24-26, 1996
University Park, PA



Dissemination

Body of the Report

Professional development activities are an essential component to a well-informed and well-prepared workforce. In education at all levels, ongoing and supportive professional development supports and enhances the capacity for each practitioner to positively respond to the needs of adult learners. In the field of Adult Basic Education (ABE), however, neither the enhancement of its practitioners' professional qualifications nor the needs of its adult learners are being adequately met through traditional professional development methods. In fact, the preparation of instructors, administrators, and volunteers is considered by the field to be one its greatest needs (Kutner, 1992).

There are many reasons why professional development is particularly challenging in the field of Adult Basic Education. Kutner (1992) suggests, for instance, that unlike teachers who enter the K-12 or higher education venues, "many ABE . . . [including English as a Second Language] teachers and volunteer instructors receive little or no training, either in subject matter content or in the process of teaching . . . to adults" prior to entering the field (p. 1). In essence, because they enter the field with very little *preservice* training, most practitioners require an intensive *inservice* training. This type of training is best facilitated through ongoing intervention, rather than a one-shot workshop. Unfortunately, these types of initiatives require not only a different mindset but a dismantling of barriers that typically work against the professional development of the field's practitioners.

There are many barriers which discourage local adult education programs from offering ongoing professional development program in Adult Basic Education. Programs very often operate on meager budgets where most, if not all, of the money is allocated to meeting programming goals. The part-time nature



Statement of Problem

of the workforce coupled with the isolation of the instructional setting also negatively impact participation in professional development programs.

For the individual practitioner, the benefits of seeking out adequate professional development activities do not always outweigh the effort, time, and, very often, financial commitments required for participation. In fact, Fingeret & Cockley (1992) point out that ABE professionals rarely receive incentives for engaging in professional development activities. They add, moreover, that ABE practitioners are generally paid far less than professionals at other levels of education and receive few, if any, benefits for their hard work. Perhaps the greatest deterrent to engaging in any meaningful, long-term professional development, however, is that there are very few career opportunities within the field making professional development seem futile, if not foolish to the practitioner (Fingeret & Cockley, 1992). Kutner (1992) maintains, therefore, that "the challenge for the adult education field is to design an effective system of staff development within the constraints of the ABE and ESL delivery system" (p. 1). It is a formidable challenge indeed.

Positive change at the systemic level also presents a formidable challenge since the traditional models of professional development in ABE are based upon the perception of practitioner deficits in the repertoire of skills and knowledge that is considered necessary for good practice. Professional developers, therefore, frequently design activities that use the *knowledge transmission* model in which teachers' gaps in skills and knowledge are assessed (Fingeret & Cockley, 1992; Lieberman & Miller, 1991; Pates & Fingeret, 1994). This model of professional development assumes that practitioners are unable (or unwilling) to identify issues that, when explored, could positively affect their practices; the control of the professional development process is, therefore, removed from the practitioner and given to an outside source or expert (Fingeret & Cockley, 1992). In other words, "teachers . . . [become] relatively passive recipients of knowledge that has been created by others (Fingeret & Cockley, 1992, p. 6). Because of the dislocation between the professional development issues that are chosen *by* them and the professional development issues that are designed and disseminated *to* them, practitioners have no particular stake in the developmental process nor in the typical types of professional development

activities that ensue.

The typical professional development activities to which the ABE practitioner is exposed "take place through voluntary inservice offerings (e.g., workshops, conferences, seminars)" (Kutner, 1992, p. 1). This type of professional development, while

better than nothing, fails to meet the ongoing needs of practitioners. Indeed, Osterman & Kottkamp (1993) assert that these types of professional development activities may "seldom lead to noticeable improvement or change in professional practice" (p. 33). Pelavin Associates (1991) add that "evidence from a variety of sources indicates that single workshops and training sessions without opportunities for follow-up are ineffective in bringing about changes in teacher . . . behavior" (p. 8). What, then, is the point of the professional development activities if there is no resulting change in practice?

The knowledge transmission paradigm has met with considerable criticism from researchers in the professional development literature base. Lieberman & Miller (1991) contend, for instance, that the knowledge transmission paradigm is "outdated" and that it is "based on formulations of teaching and learning that are currently being challenged and replaced" (pp. 9-10). Fingeret & Cockley (1992) advise, therefore, that professional development "activities . . . [must] move away from being mostly episodic . . . offered to teachers on a range of topics that they often had no (or a minimal) role in identifying" (p. 13).

Without engaging practitioners in the implementation as well as the development and evaluation of research, the potential use of the ABE field's literature base as a professional development tool is lost. Indeed, without engaging practitioners in the design, implementation, and evaluation of any professional development initiative, the potential for a well-informed and well-prepared core of practitioners is lost. There are many reasons the field has been slow to implement practitioner input into the development, implementation, and evaluation of professional development activities. The

*Participant
Comment:*

***"I reflect on the day's successes
and failures in a more
constructive way, looking to
modify and improve rather than
assess blame and throw out"***

(H.A.).

knowledge transmission paradigm is easy, familiar and logistically simple. It is conducted by outside "experts," does not require ongoing reflection or commitment from practitioners, and lends itself to the part-time, geographically isolated ABE service delivery model. Because of this paradigm, Fingeret & Cockley (1992) maintain that practitioners "are not reading adult education journals. . ." to garner an understanding of the current theoretical positions of the field and are, therefore, not integrating even exemplary research into their practice (p. 15). This is not surprising, however, since, according to Ross (1984), the results of research are viable only when practitioners "view research as integrated with practice rather than as a process which is conducted separately and then implemented in classroom" (Cited in Berlin & White, 1992, p. 4). The challenge, then, is to create a professional development model that is logistically appropriate for the existing service delivery model, sensitive to practitioner participation barriers, and emphasizes the integration of research with day-to-day practice.

*Participant
Comment:*

"I think the impact of participating in the ESL On-Line Action Research Project has been to reinforce the idea that research, as a vehicle for program growth and enhancement, must match the needs, abilities and priorities of the students, staff and administration involved"
(C.O.).

*Participant
Comment:*

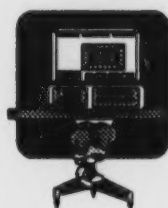
". . . although I had identified certain problems in my practice, I was not always motivated to spend the time necessary to find solutions and to implement them, especially since correcting the problems . . . would require me to do a lot of work at home on my own time"
(K.U.).

The primary goal of the 1995-1996 Online Action Research (OAR) Project was to create an infrastructure for supporting and guiding Pennsylvania's Adult Basic Education (ABE) practitioners through their first practitioner research projects. In particular, the 1995-1996 OAR project focused on Pennsylvania's ESL practitioners. Specific project objectives included:

- ☐ Linking three teams of ESL practitioners in urban, suburban, and rural parts of Pennsylvania via a telecommunications network for the purpose of action research;
- ☐ Participating in the OAR component of PRO-NET by having project participants communicate through the OARCOM forum;
- ☐ Facilitating the contribution of original Pennsylvania ESL action research data to the OARDATA component of PRO-NET;
- ☐ Initiating practitioner inquiry and collegial sharing within the ESL Program Division of PAACE; and,
- ☐ Demonstrating a relationship between ESL action research and learner gains in a classroom and/or tutor environment.
- ☐ Developing an e-mail network among adult education practitioners in order to facilitate the rapid dissemination of information to the field.

These objectives led to the creation of a second infrastructure that was used to support the use of technology in ABE professional development initiatives.

The OAR model has provided, and will continue to provide, valuable inroads for ABE practitioners into professional development at a national level and help to make practitioner research more inviting for ABE practitioners throughout Pennsylvania. By building upon the documented success of the CASAS Online Action Research project and coordinating all project activities with CASAS, the 1995-1996 OAR project proved to be an important component of the professionalization of Pennsylvania's ABE practitioners as well as ABE practitioners across the US.



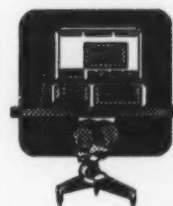
Goals & Objectives

The 1995-1996 Online Action Research (OAR) Project administered by Lancaster Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13 (IU 13) in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Association for Adult & Continuing Educators (PAACE) linked five teams of English as a Second Language (ESL) practitioners together throughout Pennsylvania. The OAR teams identified problems, situations, or concerns from within their own practices and used them to carry out their own practitioner research projects. Throughout the course of their individual projects, participants maintained contact with their research partner, the other participants, the project director, and the project trainer via the Internet.

Participant Selection

ESL Online Action Research participants were recruited in a variety of ways. Pennsylvania's professional development centers were instrumental in disseminating information about the project and contacting individuals within their regions who they believed would be interested in the project. Information about the project was printed in the **PAACE News** and **What's the Buzz**, a statewide ABE newsletter. Information packets describing the OAR project were distributed to all ABE programs throughout Pennsylvania. Application forms were also included in these packets. Interested practitioners were invited to complete the application and return it to IU 13.

The initial response to project recruitment activities was extremely positive. While there were numerous inquiries, many individuals self-eliminated because they lacked sufficient hardware for participation in the project. Those who returned applications were interviewed via telephone to ascertain their motivation to conduct a practitioner research project and their access to the necessary hardware: a computer, modem, and phone line. Ten of the twenty-four applicants were ultimately chosen to participate. They



Methods & Procedures

were grouped into five (5) teams of two (2). At the conclusion of the 1995-1996 program year, each participant who completed the project received a \$350 stipend for their participation in the 1995-1996 Online Action Research Project.

Project Specifics

The 1995-1996 OAR project was designed using the advice of researchers of professional development. As Brindley (19) put it, for instance, project advisors should:

assist by providing teacher-researchers with initial support in framing research questions; by introducing them to research tools and methods which allow them to work through their own questions . . . ; by being available for consultation throughout the research process; by setting up research partnerships and/or networks . . . ; and by assisting with the publication and/or dissemination of the results of teacher-conducted research. (p. 104).

Each part of Brindley's (19) advice was incorporated into the OAR project.

Provide Support, Tools, & Methods for Research

Prior to beginning their individual research projects, each of the participants convened in a face-to-face two-day workshop. A training outline is included in Appendix A. The first day of the workshop was spent introducing the participants to the Internet. Hands-on training was provided for sending e-mail, subscribing to listservs, downloading and uploading documents, and other Internet options. The technical language was kept to a minimum. This part of the training seemed to be especially useful and appreciated by the participants.

The second day of the workshop focused on the methods for conducting a practitioner research project. The participants were shown a number of action research and practitioner inquiry models from which they could choose to conduct their own research project. No specific model was determined for them. In other words, participants were free to choose the model that worked best for them. Developing research questions, understanding qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection, and evaluation of results were all topics that were presented on the second day of the training.

Set up Research Partnerships and Networks

At the initial training, project participants were informed that they would work in teams. This did not mean, however, that they would not have access to the full group. On the contrary, utilizing the full group was encouraged; maintaining contact with one's research partner, however, was required. In addition, each participant was encouraged to meet each month in an online chat with the full group. These virtual meetings which were held via the Internet lasted one hour and focused on each individual's progress in conducting his/her project.

Be Available for Consultation

Each participant had access to two (2) professionals with whom they could discuss concerns, solicit advice and/or guidance, and use as overall research project resources. The project director and the project trainer/facilitator were accessible to the participants via e-mail, telephone, and occasional site visits. This provided an ongoing and highly supportive structure for the project participants.

Disseminating the Results

At the end of the project, each participant was asked to complete an evaluative narrative discussing their findings and their frustrations as well as the expected and unexpected outcomes of being involved in the 1995-1996 Online Action Research Project. Participants were asked to comment particularly on how using the research method and online capabilities affected their practice and the learning needs of their adult learners. The narratives, which are included in Appendix B, were submitted to a nationwide database of action research projects.

In addition to the narratives, project participants were asked to assist in the dissemination of the project's findings at two conferences: one regional and one national. Several participants accepted the invitation to present at the conferences; for most, it was their first conference presentation.

Objective 1: To link three teams of ESL practitioners in urban, suburban, and rural parts of Pennsylvania via a telecommunications network for the purpose of action research.

Five teams of practitioners were accepted into the ESL Online Action Research Project. Three participants classified themselves as administrators, two as administrator/teacher, and five as teacher/tutors.

Pennsylvania is divided into six professional development regions. Project participants were distributed as follows:

Northwest PDC - 2 participants

Southwest PDC - 1 participant

Central/Northeast PDC - 0 Participants

Southcentral PDC - 2 Participants

Southeast PDC - 4 Participants

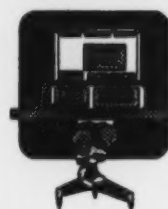
Philadelphia PDC - 1 Participant

Seven participants finished the project and submitted final reports. Three participants participated in the project but did not bring their individual projects to fruition. One participant was never able to get online due to hardware issues that could not be resolved within her agency.

Participant

Comment:

"My partner was a source of encouragement. Both by example and by exhortation, she helped to keep me on track, especially when I became frustrated by various situations" (K.S.).



Objective 1

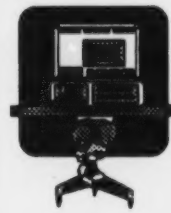
Objective 2: To Participate in the OAR component of PRO-NET by having project participants communicate through the OARCOM forum.

Although the OARCOM forum was scheduled to be up and running by September 1995, it did not become operational until the spring of 1996. In addition, even with assistance from IU 13's technology support staff, the project administrators were never able to get the software distributed by Pelavin Research Institute to work correctly and were therefore reticent to distribute it to project participants.

All project participants were provided with ten hours each month of online time through America Online. Some participants chose to supplement this with local Internet accounts. America Online was chosen because it has group chat capability, is relatively user friendly, and offers extensive online technical assistance. Project administrators recognized that one day of Internet training would not be sufficient for less experienced computer users. The online technical assistance feature was intended to provide technical project support to participants as they began to navigate through the Internet.

On the down side, three participants did not have local access numbers for America Online. Since project participants were not selected based upon their access to AOL, the project incurred long distance surcharges for these individuals. Further, AOL's World Wide Web browser is cumbersome and awkward compared to others such as Netscape. This proved frustrating to project participants who did much of their research via the Web.

Though communication did not take place through the OARCOM forum, it was coordinated with Pro-Net through regular contact with CASAS personnel.

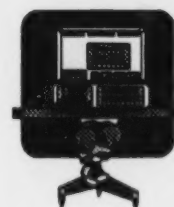


Objective 2

**Objective 3: To Facilitate the contribution of original
Pennsylvania ESL action research data to the OARDATA
component of PRO-NET.**

Seven final project summaries (Appendix B) as well as this final report are being submitted to CASAS for inclusion in the national Online Action Research Database. Linda Taylor at CASAS, who is responsible for coordinating individual state contributions to the national database, provided training materials, advice and ongoing support throughout the duration of the project. Since this was the first time project administrators had facilitated either a practitioner research or an online professional development project, Ms. Taylor's advice was particularly helpful.

Both project facilitators attended the Pro-Net Conference in January 1996 where they were able to compare notes with other professional developers who are involved in this type of work and learn how similar projects are being implemented in other states.

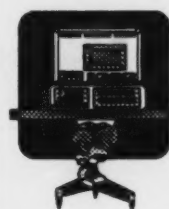


Objective 3

Objective 4: To initiate practitioner research and collegial sharing within the ESL Program Division of PAACE.

Eight of the practitioners who participated in the ESL Online Action Research project identified themselves as members of PAACE (Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education). The PAACE English as a Second Language Program Division was kept apprised of the project through frequent updates in **The PAACE News** and targeted mailings throughout the year. In addition, project findings were presented at the 1996 **Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE)** conference which was cosponsored by PAACE and will be presented at the **Eastern Adult, Continuing, and Distance Education Research Conference** which is also cosponsored by PAACE.

As a PAACE ESL Program Division activity, this project has real significance within Pennsylvania. Among ABE practitioners in Pennsylvania, PAACE is best known for its sponsorship of a Midwinter Conference where adult educators from across the state come together to share expertise, peruse new materials, and learn about new and exciting developments within their field. While this is an exciting opportunity for networking and awareness building, as a professional development opportunity, a conference cannot support the type of systemic change in teaching and learning that occurs with practitioner research. By supporting the ESL Online Action Research, PAACE has taken a leadership role in promoting professional development that is tied to the day-to-day practice of its members.



Objective 4

Objective 5: To demonstrate a relationship between ESL action research and learner gains in a classroom and/or tutor environment

The link between professional development and learner gains in a classroom and/or tutor environment has always been elusive. At the onset of the project, participants were asked to reflect upon how their practitioner research question relates to learner gains. For some participants this was more difficult than others. This exercise was repeated periodically throughout the project to help participants stay focused on teaching and learning. The point of the exercise was not to force participants to ask a particular question or to gather a specific type of data, but rather, to position learning gains as a beacon for professional development.

Although participants collected a variety of data as part of their research projects, only one of the participants chose to collect quantitative data related to learner progress as a part of their individual project. The following are the research questions participants chose to investigate:

- ☐ What keeps students coming back to class week after week?
- ☐ How does native language literacy and the level of education attained in the first language influence the needs and goals of our ESL students?
- ☐ Will the introduction of computer training with selected reading software, paired with one-on-one tutoring, cause literacy students to: achieve a two grade increase in tested reading rate quicker than traditional methods and would the use of these computers to teach reading foster an increase in computer literacy in students and tutors?
- ☐ Are student directed pair groups effective in developing better communication skills for the individual student?
- ☐ What can I learn about tutor training from looking at current research and collecting data from tutors, students and colleagues that will help me design a tutor training manual to be used in my worksite?
- ☐ How does instructor feedback impact student learning and/or student perceptions of learning?



Objective 5

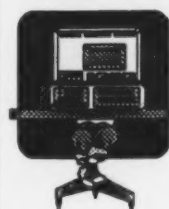
- ☐ Will gathering information on student needs improve retention in the ESL program?
- ☐ How does giving awards for attendance impact student retention?
- ☐ Will students who receive support services have better attendance than those who do not?
- ☐ How can we help students better articulate their learning goals?

There is little doubt that each of these questions is closely connected to teaching and learning in adult basic education. Because these issues emerge from the day-to-day practice of ABE practitioners, related research cannot help but lead to overall program improvement and, ultimately, increased learner gains.

The ESL Online Action Research Project successfully met its objectives as detailed in the preceding pages. In addition, not only did each individual research project provide its author with new and exciting insights into his/her everyday practice (Appendix B), but each of the seven research projects completed during the 1995-96 program year contains insights and findings that could be of interest and/or benefit to other adult ESL practitioners. The importance of the individual research projects cannot be overemphasized. Not only do they contain a wealth of information about second language instruction in Pennsylvania, but they also function as springboards for continued discussion and research.

Throughout the project, the project facilitators were able to conduct formative evaluations by (1) using a catalogue of e-mail notes that were passed among project participants, (2) reading and analyzing participant journals that were shared between research partners, and (3) using the real-time chat transcripts from the monthly group meetings. In other words, the project advisors were able to gauge the effectiveness of the project as it progressed by analyzing the communication from and between the project participants. They were, therefore, able to make the necessary adjustments to the project as it progressed. One of the most notable adjustments, for instance, was the addition of a monthly full group chat via the Internet. This was added to the project at the participants' request.

At the end of the 1995-1996 program year, the project participants were asked to submit a summative evaluation in the form of a narrative. Each participant was supplied with a list of thirteen questions assessing his/her role in the project. The narrative was used to evaluate each practitioner's individual research project and to determine the effects of the practitioner research project on his/her professional development as well as on his/her adult learners.



Project Evaluation

Although there were many interesting findings that can be attributed to the 1995-1996 OAR project, the major findings have been grouped into themes for ease of reporting. The four most prevalent themes are communicating with a partner, using technology in a new way, becoming a researcher and unexpected outcomes.

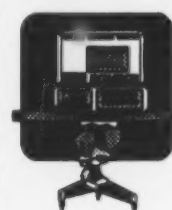
Communicating with a Partner

Although practitioner research may be done individually or collaboratively, most professional development researchers maintain that those that are conducted collaboratively are the most effective (Johnson, 1993). LeLoup & Ponterio (1995) maintain, for instance, that "continuous contact with colleagues . . . will inevitably result in a better-informed and prepared cadre of . . . practitioners" (p. 10). Moreover, collegial sharing enables the learning that is a result of the professional development activities of one to have a greater impact when it is shared, analyzed, digested, and synthesized anew by a group of colleagues.

Sharing professional development activities also promotes a new relationship among practitioners. "When practitioners view themselves as participating in a research community," assert Fingeret & Cockley (1992), "they stand in a different relationship to their daily conversations, which now become a continuing source of data . . ." (p. 16). The participants' communications in the OAR project illustrate Fingeret & Cockley's (1992) point. As one OAR participant put it:

I feel that I have made a new friend and have enjoyed communicating with her throughout the project . . . I find that the sharing of ideas greatly facilitates the research process. (Final, C.U., 1996)

The experiences of the OAR participants prove that it is optimal to have groups of practitioners engaged in practitioner research to build a supportive and



Project Results

***Participant
Comment:***

***"I found my
experience with my
partner to be the
most positive part of
the project"
(C.U.).***

understanding learning community. This does not mean that all practitioners need necessarily to be engaged in the same project; each individual could be working on his/her own project. It does mean, however, that a communications forum is provided as part of the overall professional development initiative. M.U. illustrates the value of collaboration on the research process when she wrote about the positive affects the OAR project has had on her practice. She said: "The main reason, I believe [it has been so successful for me], is because of the network of colleagues I've had to reflect with me about my work" (Final, 1996). Indeed, most of the OAR participants felt strongly that the collegial sharing component of the OAR project was essential to its success and most wanted to see that component strengthened and even extended in future projects. W.I. advised the project advisors, for instance, that more time should be spent in building a rapport between research partners. She wrote:

I thought communicating with a partner would be the easiest part of the project, but actually, it turned out to be the most difficult I think there was not enough time for us to really understand each other's project (Final, 1996).

Another participant echoed these sentiments:

I think it would be helpful to provide a format for getting acquainted with one another and with the details of our work. Knowing as much as possible about the workplace and the specific setting for the research inquiry would enable me to provide more helpful guidance to a partner. Furthermore, I would receive suggestions with greater confidence if I knew my partner was informed about my specific teaching environment. This was a frustration for me in real time chats because each time I would make a comment or suggestion, ——— would come back with a reason why the idea wouldn't work. From our interaction it became clear to me that I needed to know more about the details of ——— 's workplace. (Final, 1996)

Collegial sharing took several forms: e-mail messages, journal entries and online chats. Of the ten project participants, three communicated with their partners frequently, five communicated

sometimes, and two communicated rarely or never. The two participants who communicated rarely or never both had hardware problems which prevented them from communicating online for long periods of time, if at all. The three who communicated frequently made online communication a part of their daily practice. Most participants fell somewhere between the two extremes.

Unfortunately, just because participants had the technological ability to communicate online didn't mean they possessed the communication skills necessary for providing insightful feedback and ongoing support throughout the research process. Clearly, participants would have benefited from training in this area. Further, structured feedback exercises such as those used in PALPIN (Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Network) might have provided partners with a framework for discussing projects in a meaningful and encouraging way. Comments such as "sounds good" are indeed conversation enders. Unfortunately, participants were not always sure what else to say. It is interesting that the participant quoted above felt frustrated that her partner rejected her suggestions and, because of this, wanted a structure for learning the details of her partner's workplace. Why didn't she just ask her partner for those details? Though this type of communication problem is certainly not a technology issue, it does seem that online communication exacerbates certain kinds of communication problems.

*Participant
Comment:*

"The Project Director and Trainer were both very supportive and encouraging throughout the project. Their enthusiasm and warmth were evident during the training, and I felt that there was no question that they wouldn't be open to . . ."
(D.U.).

Many participants offered advice on how to strengthen research partnerships as well as full group relationships. Several suggested more face-to-face meetings, more phone contact, and regularly scheduled partner chats via the Internet. Each of these suggestions talk to the need of more and better collegial sharing within the ABE field. Several project participants suggested that working in facilitated small groups may be more beneficial than partner work. With a few exceptions, the monthly real time chats were one of the most popular features of the project. Following each session, project staff received

numerous e-mail messages describing how beneficial the session was. Not only was there a project facilitator working to keep the conversation focused, but responsibility for giving meaningful feedback was shared among several project participants. Another participant suggested that project staff hold weekly forum sessions where participants can drop in to chat or obtain technical assistance. Each of these approaches is worthy of exploration.

***Participant
Comment:***

"The live chats were very stimulating and helped to give us a sense of camaraderie, incentive to match the other participants' progress, and various leads on sources of information"
(K.U).

While the development of practitioner communities is a strong component of any professional development initiative, as is evident in the professional development literature as well as the OAR project findings, it is often difficult to incorporate any meaningful, continuous collegial sharing opportunities for ABE practitioners. ABE professionals often teach in locations where their program administrators can find adequate low-rent or no-rent space—church basements, JTPA offices, worksites, community buildings, etc.—ABE professionals are very often isolated one from the other (Fingeret & Cockley, 1992; Lytle, Belzer & Reumann, 1991). It is particularly difficult, therefore, for practitioners to find colleagues with whom to share teaching strategies, questions, concerns, and insights, recruitment and assessment concerns, and plain old professional camaraderie. Collegial sharing is particularly difficult in Pennsylvania, a very large, rural state. In fact, according to the 1994 *PAACE ESL Program Division Member Survey*, collegial sharing is cited by a full 97% of the respondents as their greatest professional development need (PAACE Newsletter, 1994).

By providing an easily accessible collegial sharing forum wherein the project participants could not only engage in an intellectual debate with each other about methods, curricula, and materials but could also vent frustrations, share "war" stories, and provide encouragement to each other, the OAR project served to meet one of the practitioners' most often-cited needs. An example of a typical e-mail between research partners would be:

The [real time] chat was informative and fun. I'm looking forward to our getting to share in real time. I'm making some progress on my project. How about you? Did you receive my last couple of messages? Hope to hear from you soon." (e-mail, M.U., 1996)

There may be no intellectual debate going on here, but there is something very important happening: an interest in what another practitioner is doing in his/her practice. These types of messages served to motivate the project participants to move forward on their individual projects and their professional development at large.

Providing a professional network for the participants of the OAR project was one of the most appreciated and most widely used aspects of the project. As the OAR project progressed, participants began to see themselves as part of a professional community that included other practitioners, articles published in adult education and second language journals, and practice-related electronic bulletin boards. In effect, the need to communicate regularly with a research partner during the OAR project gave the individual practitioners the impetus and the means to extend a singular research partnership into a wealth of partnerships with many other sectors of the profession. Once-isolated practitioners were amazed to see how many other practitioners worked under the same types of physical conditions as they did. It was also exciting for them to find out that there were others who found the same types of professional concerns as important as they did. K.U., for instance, e-mailed the project advisors to say:

it's so good to be communicating with people who 1) care about what I am doing as an ESL teacher 2) understand what I am trying to do. Up till now I was completely isolated. Secondly, on a professional level, reading the daily postings on TESL-L has been not only intellectually stimulating (for someone like me who has been out of school for so long), but also useful in a practical way. (e-mail, 1996)

The ability to communicate with colleagues stimulated the project participants to engage in other areas of professional development: conferences, workshops, time spent reading research. These activities helped the participants feel that they were, indeed, part of a larger adult basic education community. One participant who was prompted to write about sharing experiences with colleagues from within the OAR group as well as with colleagues via an international listserv wrote: "I have been challenged to look beyond the limited scope of my own work site and to see myself as part of the larger body of adult

educators" (Final, K.U., 1996). It is this quote which sums up the professional development benefits of building a network for collegial sharing. When colleagues share vision, excitement, and belief in what they do with others, their enthusiasm and motivation inevitably rise; their adult learners are the ultimate beneficiaries.

Using Technology In a New Way

The cost and distance of traveling across a state the size of Pennsylvania is prohibitive for adult educators who wish to network with colleagues in other areas of the state. Fortunately, the Internet holds great promise in reducing practitioner isolation thereby increasing collegial sharing among ABE practitioners. Cyberspace is an ideal meeting ground for educators who wish to pursue professional interests with their colleagues. For the price of a local phone call, practitioners can consult with colleagues on a state or national level about materials, lesson plans, administrative tasks, grammar points, and cross-cultural communication issues. These same practitioners may even decide to (up)download materials, office forms, and/or lesson plans. Moreover, utilizing a communications network will enable them to learn from each other without ever having to meet face-to-face. To achieve the same result, it might take dozens of one-shot workshops, hours of independent research, money for toll calls, and/or weeks to receive information that had been sent through the traditional mail service. The Internet, according to Seguin (1994), "is the ultimate 'virtual classroom' that can be used anytime anywhere with minimal equipment" (p. 2). In a state the size of Pennsylvania, this is an important asset. By connecting to the Internet, Pennsylvania ABE professionals are provided with a cost-effective and easily accessible communications venue as a component of any professional development initiative.

Participants'
Comments:

"I've definitely increased my confidence with using technology. I haven't had as much time as I would like to explore the internet. However, in my brief browsing I have found a lot of informative material; the potential is truly amazing" (M.U.).

"I did manage to function on a basic level on-line within predictable contexts, i.e. e-mail, chats, basic exploration of Internet Connections and downloading information. I also showed initiative in accessing Internet information and training here . . ." (C.O.).

The Internet is a vast worldwide network of smaller computer networks that links millions of users (Tennant, 1992). Each of the smaller computer networks may have tens of thousands of computers linked to it leading Tennant (1992) to conclude that "this high level of connectivity fosters an unparalleled degree of communication, collaboration, resource sharing, and information access" (p. 1). And, as Seguin (1994) points out, "there is really no owner—it is 'owned' by the 15 million who use it daily . . . [and] it is located all over the world, including the continent of Antarctica" (p. 2). In effect, the Internet is an open forum that is not beholden to the prejudices of any one business or one individual or one country or even one continent.

The Internet offers a number of communications options including e-mail (electronic mail), electronic networking, file protocol transfer, and information databases that can be utilized for professional development opportunities. It is instantaneous and convenient. It is not subjected to the constraints of time and place. The Internet is, in effect, a highly effective communication venue for conducting professional development activities.

The ESL Online Action Research project was designed to link three teams, or six ESL practitioners from across the state via telecommunications. Due largely to the mystique of the Internet, interest in the project was much greater than anticipated. Following the initial dissemination of project information, inquiries were received from all regions of the state. While many individuals and programs lacked the hardware necessary for participation, many others were willing to upgrade equipment, install phone lines, and purchase modems if they could be included in the project. In fact, interest in learning about and/or using the Internet was given by eighteen of the twenty applicants as a reason for wanting to participate in the project. This response, given by one project participant, was typical:

I applied to participate in the Online project because of my interest in Internet technology, the rural geography and isolation of — County and my feeling that such training in the Internet would be a valuable skill for me to have. There are only a few employees of ———— — who know anything about the Internet - this training would give me an advantage over [them]. My expectations were to gain knowledge of the Internet and a new marketable skill, to meet new people and to keep improving my skills as an educator. (Interview, K.U., 1996)

Because project participants were recruited from all over the state, only the initial project training had face-to-face meetings. Of the ten practitioners chosen for participation in the project, only two had any familiarity with the Internet. Two participants classified their technological expertise as "beginning level," six felt they were "intermediate level," and two classified themselves as "advanced" computer users. Project participants met in Lancaster for one day of Internet training and one day of training in practitioner research. The technology training included an introduction to the Internet, America Online, e-mail and online chats. At the initial project training, the goal

of the computer training component was to help participants alleviate the fear associated with the hardware as well as the mystique associated with computer and network jargon. The training focused on using the computer and the Internet and "kept technical information simple [since] practitioners are alienated by computer jargon" (Stahlhut, 1994, p. 8). As one participant wrote:

I was a computer skeptic a few years ago, and found online language completely foreign just six months ago. Now, I can say that I have begun to learn another language that enables me to communicate with more people and get more information (Final, D.U., 1996).

All but one of the participants interviewed agreed that the initial technology training was too brief for most participants to begin to understand how to navigate the Internet. This response was typical:

As I look back on the initial project training which we received I would have to say that the Internet training was much too brief for a novice such as me. What I saw during the actual computer training certainly whetted my appetite. However, I don't think I would have managed to get started quite as well as I did without additional outside help from my son. An additional day practicing on the computers would have been most helpful. For me, more detailed

*Participant
Comment:*

"My comfort level with technology has increased 100%. I now feel very confident that I can continue to work and 'surf' the Net independently and figure out most of what I would need to know. I also now know how to access Online support when I do get lost or confused"
(C.U.).

information at the initial training about ERIC and about listservs such as TESL-L, including what language is used to subscribe and how to post a message would have been helpful. (Final, K.U., 1996)

It was clear to project staff that many participants were having difficulty communicating online long before final interviews took place. One e-mail message titled, "I hate America Online," detailed the participant's frustration with not being able to connect to America Online. Participants forgot their passwords, couldn't find the online chats, lost address books, forgot to sign off and used up their monthly online time allotment. Throughout the project there was a litany of online complaints. The need for additional training surfaced again and again in online chats, e-mail messages, phone conversations and interviews.

While it is clear from the data collected that additional technology training would have been helpful for participants, the nature of that training is less clear. In the final interviews, most participants felt that an extra day of computer practice would have been beneficial. However, an analysis of the types of online problems experienced by most participants casts some doubt on whether "rote practice" would completely solve this training problem. This hit home following a site visit to a participant who, after months of online technical assistance, was still having difficulty doing some of the more basic online activities such as sending e-mail and downloading files. The project director who made the site visit is a Macintosh user and not overly familiar with the IBM PC. Further, she had not used the AOL web browser for some time. Quite unintentionally, she spent a considerable amount of time during the visit modeling the trial and error approach to online problem solving. The project participant seemed surprised that she "didn't know all the right buttons to push" and was fascinated with how she went about finding answers to her problems online. The participant admitted she had always been afraid to "just try things" and it had never occurred to her that the project staff were solving technology problems through trial and error.

*Participant
Comment:*

"Access to the Internet greatly increases the ability to do research. There are many interesting and pertinent articles to read, and the ability to communicate with others in the field is invaluable"
(D.U.).

*Participant
Comment:*

"I was more frustrated than anything. I felt better about being a researcher during the last third of the project, because the surveys and the interviews I had conducted included a lot of material . . . I see the value of doing action research and how the information gleaned can be utilized to improve our program's quality" (D.U.).

The majority of the technology problems project participants brought to staff could easily have been resolved by referring to the training reference manual or by seeking online technical assistance. Only one project participant used the training reference manual

following the training to solve her online problems. She commented in her final report:

I thought our online instruction at the IU-13 was excellent. I really learned a lot in a short period of time through the hands-on approach. The reference notebooks were excellent, too. I had learned so much at the computer workshop that I needed to refer back to something to recall all the material covered in the session. The manual also contained additional resource information that I used later when I was ready for it. I found the manual was comprehensive enough to answer most of my questions. I also felt the online instruction was the most valuable part of the training. (Final, H.A., 1996)

In their final interviews, several participants noted that they just didn't think to consult the training manual when online problems occurred. Further, they couldn't remember how to access online technical assistance or were afraid of asking a stupid question in a public forum. Clearly, in a technology training situation where extended hands-on support is not possible, more of the training must focus on giving participants the tools they need to find answers to their own technological problems. Instead of the step-by-step how to model of computer instruction, it might be more beneficial to use guided exploration as an instructional strategy to promote online problem solving.

Transfer of learning from a computer lab to the actual work environment is also a significant issue. What seems clear in one environment suddenly falls apart when the computer looks different,

does something unexpected or refuses to behave in the way you were led to believe it should during training. For novice computer users in particular, it is frequently difficult to determine whether the root cause of a technology problem is the hardware, software or end user. The two technical assistance site visits that were made during the project significantly improved the online skills of the participants involved. Although individual onsite training is expensive, if used as a follow-up to group instruction, it could significantly increase transfer of learning to the worksite.

After exploring several provider options, the project director chose America Online 2.6 (AOL) as an Internet provider. AOL was the choice of providers for the OAR project because it is easily navigated even by cyberspace neophytes. AOL also provided the participants with several options for communicating with each other, the project advisors, and outside practitioners that included e-mail, listservs, and chat capabilities. Although most of the participants eventually became adept at using AOL, several had difficulty signing on, sending e-mail, and downloading information. Those participants in rural areas of Pennsylvania seemed to have the most difficulty: there were no local phone lines and their access to AOL was more limited. One OAR participant from a rural community became so frustrated by AOL that she e-mailed her research partner saying:

AOL is very tempermental and undependable. It is 6:30 am and, once again, the entire system is down until 7:00. It is very frustrating. I do not have an individual telephone line at work, so I have to work on the project at home. I find the unreliability of AOL to be greatly inhibiting. (e-mail, C.U., 1996).

Even with the frustrations, however, most participants began to rely on the Internet and use it regularly. The participants' comfort level steadily increased as the OAR project continued. Indeed, by March 1996 participants began to e-mail each other with tips for using the network more efficiently. One topic--listservs--ballooned into a full group discussion without any prompting from the project advisors. Participants e-mailed each other describing the purpose of listservs, the process of subscribing to one, and the professional benefits of reading the daily postings. One e-mail that was posted to the group in March 1996 offered a complete list of the educational listservs. Another participant, K.U., discussed an ESL-related listserv, by posting:

Since I joined I've seen a gamut of topics, ranging from using films in class to teaching of past tense to how to tell students they smell bad (really). I've found the daily postings very informative. There are many other list serves out there. (e-mail, 1996)

As the discussion on listservs continued, the group became anxious for a member from the OAR group to post to a major ESL listserv. By the end of March 1996, a participant took the challenge. Another participant saw it and posted an e-mail to the group:

By the way, M.U. just posted a message to the TESL-L list. It was very well done. I'll be interested to see how people respond. Way to go, M.U! (e-mail, K.U., 1996).

The rapport among the project participants had become so strong that they were now not only challenging each other to try new things on the Internet but were also affirming each other's attempts.

The technological expertise that developed as part of the OAR project gave the participants the ability to conduct research in cost efficient and timesaving ways. Through listservs and chats, the participants were easily able to remain on the cutting edge of ESL. H.A. commented that:

The Internet has opened a new world to me. Every time I go on the Internet, I find a new resource or reference site. It's very exciting and has made research and communication with others of similar interests accessible to me for the first time. (Final, H.A., 1996)

K.U. added that:

I probably would not have realized the potential of this powerful means of conducting research if I had not been enlisted in the online project. Through the use of the internet, I am now able to keep in touch with the latest developments in ESL practice and to have my questions answered through communicating with other practitioners, personally and through several list serves. (Final, M.U., 1996)

The benefits of learning to use computers for professional development and as a means to share professional concerns with colleagues does not stop with information retrieval, however, One participant talked about the impact her training has had on the way she is viewed by her coworkers. She said:

I receive respect from my colleagues for having mastered a new and valuable 'cutting edge'

technology, I will probably continue to advance within my department because of my willingness to learn new skills, take on an extra work load and develop new ideas" (Final, C.U., 1996)

Another participant plans to incorporate the use of technology into her advanced ESL class. M.U. writes:

For the course I'm teaching this summer, I plan to have students sign on to a "MOO" chat with other ESL learners from various parts of the world. It should be both fun and a good learning experience" (Final, 1996)

Using technology with her students will not only give them an opportunity to learn English in a new way but will also give them the opportunity to learn a valuable skill.

Becoming a Researcher

Practitioner research has long been recognized as a highly effective professional development activity since it is a marriage of best theory and practice. Kemmis & McTaggart (1984) explain that it "provides a way of working which links theory and practice into one whole: 'ideas-in-action'" providing a valuable professional development tool (p. 5). The agent of change in the practitioner research model--the practitioner--is "an active constructor of knowledge rather than a passive consumer of it" (Abdal-Haqq, 1995, p. 3). Since, according to Cumming (1994), it is undertaken "for the purpose of understanding and improving . . . classroom practice" (p. 695), practitioner research has also been shown to be an effective means of positively affecting learner gains.

The model commences when a practitioner either alone or in partnership with other practitioner researchers chooses to critically reflect on a question, concern, and/or problem in his/her own practice. For the participants of the OAR project, choosing which issue and then constructing a researchable question was the most difficult part of the practitioner research process. For others, it was narrowing the list of possible topics down to one or two. As one participant put it: "This was probably the hardest part of the project: formulating a question that would stand the test of time" (Final, W.I., 1996). Another participant, C. U., added that "there are so many real needs that could be addressed when you are working with adult education that, narrowing down your ideas to a single, workable, topic is very

difficult" (Final, C.U., 1996). This is not unusual since, as Quigley (1995) explains, it "is perhaps the most difficult step because it begins with trying to identify the problem, deciding where to intervene, and determining if the problem, as defined, is 'researchable'" (p. 65). Researchers caution that practitioner researchers should avoid choosing a question about which a practitioner can do nothing (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1984; Quigley, 1995). After deciding on a researchable question, the practitioner researcher needs to plan a response to it, decide on and then implement some type of action, and observe the outcome. "But," as Mueller (1994) observes, "that is not the end of it, for there is then reflection on the process undertaken so far, so that further or revised plans can be made, action taken and so on in the direction of the target of change (p. 340). In other words, the process is ongoing. It is characterized as a reflective spiral of action and change (Johnson, 1993; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1984; Quigley, 1995).

Practitioner research is often characterized as a process of looking around, asking questions, and evaluating answers. It is for this reason that practitioner research is very often described as just good practice. Kemmis & McTaggart (1984) caution, however, that "to do action research is to *plan, act, observe, and reflect* more carefully, more systematically, and more rigorously than one does in everyday life. . . ." (p. 7). D.U. talked about the difference between the practitioner research model and the model of good practice by stating:

In the initial stages of participating in this action research project, I was both energized and nervous about becoming a researcher. I was excited at the prospect of stepping outside of the normal ways of doing things and at looking at them in a new light . . . " (Final, 1996)

M.U. responded to her learning of the practitioner research process for developing a critical perception of one's practice by suggesting that her participation in the OAR project had "been one of the most rewarding experiences I've had as a teacher. Being given a deliberate structure to look critically at what I already do naturally has enlivened my practice enormously" (Final, 1996).

Practitioner research also gives the practitioner a professional voice through the dissemination of his/her research findings. As Drennon (1994) points out, "the voices of practitioners have been largely absent from the field of adult literacy education research, yet practitioners are uniquely positioned

to provide an inside view of practice in adult literacy education" (p. 1). It is the practitioner's time in the classroom that ultimately provides the unique researchable opportunities and the opportunity to add to the knowledge base of the field (Drennon, 1994). Recognizing these opportunities and conducting their own research projects is very often the practitioners "first opportunity to see themselves as experts, interacting with others to generate new knowledge about teaching and learning" (Fingeret & Cockley, 1992, pp. 4-5). Practitioner research is, therefore, a truly empowering process. Practitioners are encouraged to critically analyze their own practices and the heretofore taken-for-granted assumptions of their programs and/or institutions (Abdal-Haqq, 1995; Berlin & White, 1992; Fingeret & Cockley, 1992; Mueller, 1994). For the OAR participant learning a process for the critical reflection of practice proved to be not only invigorating but also practical. H.A. asserted that:

Most teachers are well aware of classes that go well or that bomb but we don't always know why. We often make snap judgments and arbitrarily assign praise or blame without real analysis. The reflection process helped me identify the real issue and examine it to understand why I was satisfied or dissatisfied with the results of an exercise or technique, rather than just throw out the exercise or technique (Final, 1996)

For the OAR project participants, adding the critical dimension to what they do naturally was a powerful tool that helped them positively change their practices.

Practitioner research offers the practitioner other benefits as well. Abdal-Haqq (1995) points out that "effective teacher research empowers teachers, giving them greater confidence in their ability to individually and collectively promote change" (p. 3). Becoming an agent of change in their respective programs was a very positive outcome for the OAR participants as they conducted their individual projects. For instance, K.U. wrote about the positive changes that she was able to promote at her worksite by stating:

All three [of my tutor] problems may soon be solved. I went to see an administrator . . . about solving the problems before I initiate my training, and he told me that he will work with me on all three areas. . . . I'm to write up a proposal by next week and he'll work things out. I can hardly believe it! This will solve all of my main tutor concerns, besides the training itself. If I weren't doing the online project I may never have gotten this kind of cooperation. (e-mail,

1996)

Other participants promoted positive change by developing some type of a product as a result of their research projects. For instance, one participant developed a training video and tutor training manual; another developed a computer program with an accompanying training manual.

Patterson (1993) maintains that "educators who learn in their classrooms, who conduct research and write about their observations, become the best possible teachers . . ." (p. vii). It is no wonder, therefore, that in the professional development initiatives, practitioner research has become a powerful method aimed at improving practice in Adult Basic Education (Drennon, 1994; Quigley, 1995). Indeed, in the state of Pennsylvania, practitioner research has become an important component of the ongoing and supportive professional development agendas offered to the ABE practitioner through the state's regional professional development centers.

In examining online technology as a primary communication vehicle for adult education practitioner research projects, it is important to ask whether this type of communication is capable of sustaining the action research process. Of the ten participants who began the project, seven have brought their action research projects to fruition. Two of the participants who have chosen not to complete their projects are also the two participants who were not able to maintain online communication due to hardware difficulties. This would suggest that while daily online communication is not necessary; some regular communication is essential for project success. There is nothing in the action research model that requires community or collegial sharing; however, without it, participant motivation appears to decline sharply.

Unexpected Outcomes

The ESL Online Action Research Project had several unexpected outcomes both for project participants and project administrators. The unexpected outcomes cited by project participants in their final reports and interviews seemed to fall into three categories: 1) new ways of perceiving others (students, colleagues, administrators); 2) new ways of being perceived by others; and 3) new ways of

perceiving themselves. In their final interviews, both K.U. and C.U. noted that both colleagues and supervisors were treating them with greater respect as a result of their participation in the project. K.U. in particular said that, for the first time, her colleagues seem genuinely interested in what she is doing in her classroom and seemed to realize that language instruction is more than just speaking English to someone. C.U. commented that her students seemed to be less dependent and anxious for her to solve their problems. She speculated that this might be because, as she became more aware of her interactions with them, they began to perceive her role differently than they did at the onset of the project. It might also be that C.U. is treating her students differently than she had. Regardless, there is little doubt that the relationship between C.U. and her students has improved.

Several participants commented on new insights into their staff and students. C.O. expressed disappointment that his staff was not more enthusiastic about his action research project. W.I. was surprised to find confusion among tutors, students and staff when they were asked to collaborate with each other. It is very possible that C.O.'s staff has never been particularly interested in research and that the tutors, students and staff in W.I.'s program have been confused about communication lines for a long time. The important thing is that C.O. and W.I. are now aware of the situations and can choose whether or not to intervene. This awareness will make them more effective administrators.

Finally, it is interesting how many of the participants appeared to view themselves and the world differently as a result of their participation in this project. M.U.'s statement that she "honestly didn't understand that reflecting on practice and trying to come up with a question was part of the 'action research'" underscores how often practitioners view research as foreign to their every day experiences. Many participants had been away from higher education classrooms as learners for several years and the dialogue both exciting and intellectually stimulating.

In her final report, HA states that "The Internet has opened a new world to me." This was a common reaction among participants who had not previously experienced cyberspace. What came as a surprise to project administrators is how well the technology sustained the research process in ways face to face contact could not. Throughout the duration of the project, both project administrators were also participating in the Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Network. On one hand, it was exciting and helpful to watch experienced facilitators such as Alisa Belzer and Rebecca Reumann

at work. When facilitating practitioner research projects, it is extremely difficult to know when to be directive and when to allow participants to struggle to find their own answers, particularly when they are trying to formulate research questions. It was also interesting to note, however, how often reluctance to travel, schedule conflicts, and inclement weather interfered with scheduled PALPIN meetings. In contrast, during the January blizzard, Online Action Research participants were able to compare snowfall measurements in their weekly journal entries and begin their project research online.

Final interviews and reports contain a wealth of data to support the quality and quantity of the research participants have conducted as part of the project. The sheer volume of data collected by project staff throughout the duration of the project will continue to provide insights into the many ways technology can support and enhance practitioner research. Clearly, online action research is not an easy process. All of the participants in this project experienced some degree of frustration as they simultaneously grappled with the action research process, the difficulties of collegial communication and navigating the Internet. The seven participants who completed their projects overwhelmingly believe that the project has been beneficial to their practice. "Participating in this project has been one of the most rewarding experiences I've had as a teacher," MU commented. For the many adult education practitioners in Pennsylvania who work in isolation from their colleagues, online practitioner research can be a professional lifeline capable of rejuvenating day to day practice.

The following recommendations should be considered by professional developers who are planning to implement an online practitioner research project:

Project Design

- ❑ **It is important to provide a research stipend and Internet access for participants during their first year of participation.**
Individuals and programs will be reluctant to invest in online costs until they have had some direct experience with the Internet. During subsequent years of participation, individuals can be asked to cover their own online expenses. As the Internet becomes more a part of our lives, online charges will become less of an issue.
- ❑ **All participants must have the ability to participate in realtime chats using the same software.**
The real-time chats are an essential ingredient for project success. While it might be less expensive to allow participants to select any Internet access, it is essential that they have the capability of meeting all other participants online for regular discussions.
- ❑ **Experiment with different ways to choose/assign partners.**
This project failed to identify a good way of assigning/choosing partners. At the request of participants, partners were assigned following the training based upon input from the group. Some participants felt they didn't have enough time at the training to develop a rapport with potential partners; others felt partners should have been assigned prior to the training.

Recruitment

- ❑ **Recruitment should begin as early in the program year as possible.**
Participant recruitment takes much longer than would normally be expected -- largely due to the hodgepodge of hardware possessed by potential participants. Applicants should be interviewed to ascertain whether they have the necessary hardware for continued participation in the project.

Technology Training and Support

- ❑ **The initial technology training should include extended hands-on practice, guided exploration and online problem solving strategies.**
Participants need to know how to solve their own online problems and



Recommendations

not rely totally on project facilitators every time a computer question arises.

- ☐ **Whenever possible, follow-up technology support should include a site visit by project facilitators.**

Follow-up visits greatly enhance transfer of learning. Working with participants in their own setting dramatically increases their success with technology.

Communication

- ☐ **Project facilitators should encourage and support communication between partners, small groups and the large group.**

There is no one perfect communication format. Each type of interaction contributes to the research process in different ways and not all participants prefer the same communication format.

- ☐ **Project participants should meet face to face as many times as is logistically feasible.**
All participants felt they would have benefited from additional face-to-face meetings.

- ☐ **Project facilitators should structure some, but not all, of the project feedback participants give each other.**

It might be helpful to use many of the PALPIN techniques for looking at data and providing feedback that is descriptive rather than evaluative. It is also important to encourage participants to communicate with each other in a non-structured way.

- ☐ **Project facilitators should maintain regular phone contact with participants.**

Online communication does not allow for many of the auditory cues that help us glean important communication from others. Changes in intonation and hesitations are easily discerned via phone but impossible to pick up online. It is important for the project facilitator to check out perceptions of participant progress through regular phone contact.

- ☐ **Project facilitators should schedule weekly drop-in technical assistance/communication forums.**

It is important to set aside regularly scheduled times for technical assistance. Day/evening hours should be alternated since some participants sign on from home and others from the workplace.

Abdal-Haqq, I. (1995). ERIC as a resource for the teacher researcher. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education.

Berlin, D.F., & White, A.L. (1992). Action research as a solution to the problem of knowledge utilization. Symposium: What Should Scientific Research Look Like in Science Education San Francisco, CA.

Brindley, G. (1991). Becoming a researcher: Teacher-conducted research and professional growth. In E. Sadtono, (Ed.), Issues in Language Teacher Education: Anthology Series, 30. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 370 362)

Collignon-Filipek, F., et. al. (1991). ESL/Literacy for adult non-native speakers of English: A handbook for practitioners. Providence, RI: International Institute of Rhode Island. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 339 252)

Cumming, A. (1994). Alternatives in TESOL research: Descriptive, interpretive, and ideological orientations. TESOL Quarterly, 28(4), 673-703.

Drennon, C. (1994). Adult literacy practitioners as researchers. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.

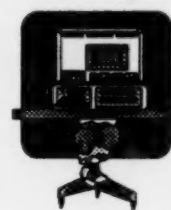
Fingeret, H.A., & Cockley, S. (1992). Teachers' learning: An evaluation of ABE staff development in Virginia. Dayton, VA: The Virginia Adult Educator's Research Network. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 356 406).

Imel, S. (1995). Trends and Issues Alerts: Adult Literacy Staff Development. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education.

Johnson, B. (1993). Teacher-as-Researcher. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 355 205)

Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1984). The action research planner. Victoria Australia: Deaken University.

Kutner, M. (1992). Staff development for ABE and ESL teachers and volunteers. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education for Limited-English Proficient Adults. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 353 862)



Works Cited

- LeLoup, J.W. & Ponterio, R. (1995). Networking with foreign language colleagues: Professional development on the Internet. Northeast Conference Newsletter, 37, p.6-10. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 383 169)
- Lieberman, Ann and Miller, Lynne. "Revisiting the Social Realities of Teaching" in Lieberman, Ann and Miller, Lynne (Eds.), Staff Development for Education in the '90s" New Demands, New Realities, New Perspectives. (second edition). New York, Teachers College Press. 1991, p. 92.
- Lytle, Susan L.; Belzer, Alisa; and Reumann, Rebecca. On the Job: Adult Literacy Practitioners as Learners and Researchers. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Unpublished report to the National Center for Adult Literacy, 1991.
- Mueller, A. (1994). Action research contributes more to teaching than just solving discrete problems in the classroom. In Bird, N., et. al. (Eds.), Language and Learning. Paper Presented at the Annual International Language in Education Conference. Hong Kong. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 386 058)
- Osterman, K.F. and Kottkamp, R.B. (1993). Reflective Practice for Educators. Newbury Park: Corwin Press.
- Pates, A. and Fingeret, Hanna. (1994). Innovative Training Practices: Practitioner Research as Staff Development. The Story of a Practitioner Research Project. Final Project Report. Durham, NC: Literacy South.
- Pelavin Associates, Inc. (1991). Study of ABE/ESL instructor training approaches: Key elements of adult education teacher and volunteer training programs. Washington, DC: Pelavin Associates.
- Quigley, A. (1995). Action research for professional development and policy formation in literacy education. PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning, 4, 61-69.
- Scribner, Sylvia and Cole, Michael. The Psychology of Literacy. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981.
- Seguin, A. (1994). Using the Internet in professional development. Paper Presented at the American Vocational Education Professional Development Association: American Vocational Association. Dallas, TX. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 379 428)
- Tennant, R. (1992). Internet basics. ERIC Digest. Syracuse, NY: Clearinghouse of Information Resources.

Training Outline

Introduction to ESL Online Action Research
1 December 1995

Performance Objective: Following instruction, participants will be able to:

- ☐ Interpret the training agenda and training manual
- ☐ Paraphrase the four objectives of the ESL Online Action Research project
- ☐ Contact other members of the ESL Online Action Research project
- ☐ Locate and interpret the project timeline in the training manual
- ☐ Describe three components of the Pro-net project
- ☐ Explain how the ESL Online Action Research project interfaces with Pro-Net
- Submit reporting forms appropriately

given the availability of the *ESL Online Action Research Training Manual*.

- I. Training Overview
 - A. Participant introductions
 - B. Training agenda
- II. ESL Online Action Research
 - A. The 1992-93 OAR Project
 - B. ESL Online Action Research project abstract
 1. Description
 2. Objectives
 3. Project timeline
 4. Participants
 - C. The Pro-Net Project
- III. Technology Overview
 - A. America Online
 1. Screen names
 2. Passwords
 3. Local access and long distance issues
 4. Installation disks
 - B. IBM vs Macintosh
 1. Getting Online
 2. Ongoing technical assistance
- IV. Action Research
 - A. Individual projects
 - B. Partners



Appendix A

C. Pro-Net OAR Database

V. Reporting Forms

- A. IU-13 Internet Services
- B. OAR Participant Information Form
- C. Letter of Agreement
- D. Stipend Verification Form
- E. Reimbursement Form
- F. OAR Teacher Researcher Survey
- G. OAR Class Demographics
- H. OAR-DATA Reporting Form

Action Research Training I
ESL Online Action Research

Performance Objective:

Upon completion of instruction, participants will be able to:

- ☐ Define action research
- ☐ Identify the seven steps of an action research project
- ☐ Explain the difference between qualitative and quantitative research
- ☐ Distinguish a researchable question from a nonresearchable question
- ☐ Identify eight guidelines for action research projects

given the opportunity to review materials and participate in informal discussion and/or assessment.

I. Definitions of Action Research

Action Research is a way to develop new skills or new approaches and to solve problems with direct application to the classroom or working world setting. (Isaac, S., *Handbook in Research and Evaluation*, 1971)

Action Research is systematic, intentional, field-based inquiry into daily practice (CASAS, 1995).

A. Underlying Assumptions (Sparks, Loucks-Horsley, 1990; McDonald, et al., 1995)

- 1. Practitioners are active constructors of their own professional practice
- 2. Practitioners are intelligent, inquiring individuals with legitimate expertise and experience
- 3. Practitioners will develop new understandings as they formulate questions and collect data
- 4. Theory and practice create an on-going spiral of knowledge
- 5. Practitioners will change practice as a result of action research

B. Models of Action Research funded by the Bureau of ABLE

- 1. Quigley Model - "Action Research for Professional Development and Policy Formation in Literacy Education"
- 2. Practitioner Inquiry Model - Susan Lytle and Alisa Belzer
- 3. CASAS Model

II. CASAS Model of Action Research

- A. Step 1 - Reflect on practice to identify a problem, issue, question or concern
 - 1. Reflect on work environment
 - 2. Reflect on strategies (instructional or administrative)
 - 3. Generate a list of ideas/issues/problems for the project
 - 4. Begin formulating a research question
- B. Step 2 - Gather supporting information
 - 1. Explore options for gathering outside and relevant information
 - 2. consider the usefulness of information
 - 3. Observe relevant contexts in your practice
 - 4. Consider triangulation
 - 5. Share findings with research partner and possibly participants
- C. Step 3 - Study the information gathered
 - 1. Analyze, interpret, and critique the outside information
 - 2. Analyze, interpret, and critique the information from observation
 - 3. Share findings from both critiques with research partner
 - 4. Collaborate with partner to decide why you are observing what you are
 - 5. Revisit research question in light of new information
 - 6. Revise research question if necessary
- D. Step 4 - Plan some action to be taken and corresponding evaluation
 - 1. Form an intervention plan
 - 2. Create a timeline for implementation
 - 3. Review information gathered in steps 2 and 3
 - 4. Document baseline information
- E. Step 5 - Implementation
 - 1. Implement the plan
 - 2. Discuss results with partner
 - 3. Record observations daily
- F. Step 6 - Monitor, evaluate and judge the quality of changes
 - 1. Analyze data gathered after implementing the action plan
 - 2. Analyze evaluation results
- G. Step 7 - Share what has been learned
 - 1. Informal discussions with colleagues
 - 2. Contribute to CASAS Online Action Research Database

III. Quantitative vs Qualitative Research

- A. Definition of quantitative research
- B. Examples of quantitative research
 - 1. Standardized tests
 - 2. Rating scales
 - 3. Interaction schedules and checklists
- C. Definition of qualitative research
- D. Examples of qualitative research
 - 1. Case studies
 - 2. Interviews
 - 3. Journals
 - 4. Video tapes

IV. Researchable and Nonresearchable Questions

- A. Start with a recognition of what is currently happening
- B. Avoid issues you can do nothing about
- C. Link questions to learner gains
- D. Prioritize burning issues
- E. Avoid questions that are too narrow or too broad

V. Eight Guidelines for Action Research Projects

Action Research Training II

ESL Online Action Research

Performance Objective: Following instruction, participants will be able to:

- ☐ Identify five general ideas for action research projects
- ☐ Link ideas to specific actions and learner gains
- ☐ Identify the stakeholders in each potential project
- ☐ Identify the constraints of each potential project
- ☐ Determine the manageability of each potential project
- ☐ Select an appropriate topic for an action research project
- ☐ Select a research partner to communicate with throughout the duration of the project

given the opportunity to interact with other project participants.

I. General Ideas for Action Research Projects

A. Discussion Questions:

- 1. What problems are you currently having at work?
- 2. What would you like to improve in your practice?
- 3. What areas of your work frustrate you the most?

B. Task:

Identify five general ideas for action research projects

II. Linking Ideas to Action and/or Learner Gains

A. Examples

- 1. Begin with what is currently happening
- 2. Emphasis is on a variation on existing practice

B. Discussion

- 1. Which of your ideas is most easily linked to action?
- 2. How are each of your ideas linked to learner gains?

C. Task:

Eliminate the two ideas that are most difficult to link to action and/or learner gains.

III. Identifying the Stakeholders

A. Action Research Stakeholders

B. Discussion Questions:

- 1. For each of your ideas, what protocol would you need to observe for permission to

- do the project?
- 2. Who are the stakeholders for each of your project ideas?
- 3. What role would each of the stakeholders have in your project?
- C. Task:
 - Put a star next to the two ideas which will have the most support from stakeholders.*
- IV. Identifying the Constraints and Determining Manageability
 - A. Types of Constraints (people, time, space, etc.)
 - B. Discussion Questions:
 - 1. What constraints can you identify for each of your project ideas?
 - 2. How might you overcome these constraints?
 - C. Task:
 - Eliminate the idea which would be least manageable*
- V. Selecting an Appropriate Topic for an Action Research Project
 - A. Sharing
 - Task #1: *Share your two ideas with each of your group members*
 - Task #2: *Provide feedback to each member about which project you would do if it were you*
 - B. Selection
 - Task: *Select the idea you would like to pursue as your action research project*
- VI. Selecting Partners
 - A. Large group sharing
 - B. Partner selection

Technology Training

Online Action Research

Performance Objective: Following the technology training and given the availability of appropriate hardware, software and media in working condition, participants will be able to:

- ☐ Install America Online (AOL) on the computer
- ☐ Provide appropriate AOL set-up specifications for the computer
- ☐ Find the best local access number for AOL
- ☐ Sign on and sign off America Online
- ☐ Send and receive e-mail messages via AOL
- ☐ Perform chat and realtime conferencing
- ☐ Search the Internet using Gopher and the World Wide Web on AOL
- ☐ Download and upload files
- ☐ Use flash sessions to conserve online time
- ☐ Check remaining online time via member services
- ☐ Reach the following locations online via AOL
 - Online Technical Assistance (Member services)
 - Pro-Net <Gopher://gopher.dial-in.nw.dc.us>
 - ERIC
 - AOL Literacy Forum

Training Outline:

I. Going Online - What it is and how you do it.

A. Definition

Online, used as a noun, refers to the Information Superhighway or "Cyberspace." The term refers to the databases and other resources available to you electronically via a computer, modem and phone line.

B. Hardware Resources

1. Computer
2. Modem
 - a. Function - Modem is short for "modulator/demodulator." It is used to convert digital signals (from the computer) to analog signals (for the phone lines) and convert them back to digital signals at a receiving terminal (another computer).
 - b. What to buy - hand-out (not covered in the training)
 - c. How to connect - hand-out (not covered in the training)
3. Phone connection - dedicated lines vs shared lines

C. Software Resources

1. Communications Program - a software application that allows you to "communicate" with the Information Superhighway using a computer, modem and phone line.
2. Overview of the Internet - video - hand-out
3. Overview of AOL - hand-out

II. How to Install, Set-up and Sign-on with America Oline

A. Installation

1. Demonstration with MAC
2. MAC vs Windows vs DOS - Specific instructions come with software

B. Set-up with AOL

1. Demonstration
 - a. Connection File
 - b. Modem Speed
 - c. Call Waiting
 - d. Touch tone/pulse
 - e. Hardware Handshaking
2. Access from more than 1 location (you can have more than 1 set-up)
3. Finding local access numbers

C. Sign-on with AOL

1. Screen name(s)
 - a. How to create a new screen name
 - a. Use both alpha and numeric passwords
 - b. Change passwords once a month
3. The clock is ticking
 - a. Each account has 10 hours each month
 - b. Writing, thinking, reading and pondering the complexities of life online
4. Discover AOL
 - a. AOL Menu Bar

b. Go To Discover AOL

Task: sign-on, and sign off.

III. E-Mail Basics

- A. How e-mail works - demo
- B. E-mail addresses
 - 1. The Domain System
 - 2. The address book
- C. E-mail tips
 - 1. Do your reading and writing offline
 - 2. Use both upper and lower case
 - 3. Keep it short
 - 4. Attaching files - use ASCII text
 - 5. Use flashsessions
 - 6. Privacy is an issue
- D. Flashsessions

IV. Chat and Real-Time Conferencing

- A. Chat Rooms
 - B. Private Chat Rooms
 - C. Smileys and Online Slang
 - D. Print chats and no one needs to take notes
- Task: Join the group in a private chat room (password: ESLOAR)*

V. The Internet Connection

- A. Gopher and WAIS

Task: Find the date of the next TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) Test (Gopher&WAIS-Education-Educational Testing Service-Tests and Svcs-TOEFL-Test Dates and Reg-1995/96 Test Schedule)
- B. World Wide Web

Task: Find the English as a Second Language Homepage <<http://www.educ.wsu.edu/esl/esl.html>>
- C. FTP

Task: Download an interesting game
- D. Newsgroups

Task: Find a newsgroup of interest to you

VI. Places of Interest

- A. Member Services

Tasks: Create a new screen name and password.

Check to see how many hours of online time you have left this month.
- B. Pro-Net

Task: Explore Pro-Net <[Gopher://gopher.dial-in.nw.dc.us](http://gopher://gopher.dial-in.nw.dc.us)>
- C. AOL Literacy Forum

Task: Go to Keyword "Literacy." Check it out.
- D. ERIC

Task: Go to Keyword "ERIC." Check it out.

Appendix B: Project Summaries

Preface to Project Summaries

The following individual project summaries have been excerpted from the much longer final reports submitted by each of the project participants. The authors of this document apologize in advance for any inaccuracies or omissions of important information supplied to them by participants. More complete information about these projects can be obtained by requesting the full final report from the Southeast Professional Development Center or by contacting the individual participant directly.

Summary of Project #1

Author: Robert Carr
The Lighthouse
1731 Pine Street, 1R
Philadelphia, PA 19133
(215) 545 - 5856

Position: Administrator/Teacher/Researcher

Type of Class Setting: ESL - Classroom

Levels of Instruction: Beginning and Intermediate

Research Question(s): Will helping students to better clarify and articulate learning goals improve motivation?

How does native language literacy and the level of education attained in the first language influence the needs and goals of our ESL students?

The Application Process:

One reason for applying to participate in the project was to enhance my own professional development. Due to scant funds for technology training in my agency and my status as a novice computer user, I hoped I would benefit from thorough and practical training in on-line services and using the Internet for research purposes. Yet another reason was the organized structure, exact time commitments and contractual nature of the project which would keep me focused on my action research.

The Selection Process:

I believe that the program director wished to include a variety of educators from different regions dealing with multiple constituencies. Although I expected my limited computer knowledge to adversely

effect my candidacy, I was pleasantly surprised that the program director also wished to select participants with varying degrees of computer literacy, beginners included.

The Initial Training:

The orientation to computer on-line services and the Internet was good, but it could have been better. I believe two full days are needed for a more thorough understanding. I left the training sure of one thing--- that I needed more training. My recommendation is to have program participants come to the training session with preliminary abstracts already prepared so that more time can be spent on the computer.

Becoming a Researcher:

I think the impact of participating in the ESL Online Action Research Project has been to reinforce the idea that research, as a vehicle for program growth and enhancement, must match the needs, abilities and priorities of the students, staff and administration involved. An important change that occurred with me was to make formal commitments of time and energy not only for this project, but for subsequent research projects which would be spawned by the findings of the original project.

Determining Your Research Question:

At the initial training, I explained that my staff and I were still strategizing about how to apply our philosophy to curricular improvements, how to impart our vision to students, and how to get students to buy into the philosophy. The program director and trainer both appreciated the ambitious goals of my staff and suggested I look at the goals closely to decide if they were all equal in importance; if one logically preceded another, or if one had priority. They also suggested I rephrase the goals in the form of a question -- a discrete, measurable question.

Using Technology in a New Way:

During the course of the project I managed to function on a basic level online within predictable contexts, i.e., chats, basic exploration of Internet Connections and downloading information. The Lighthouse has applied for and opened a LibertyNet account as well. As far as my ability to conduct research on the Internet, I think I improved in the use of computer "communication skills" but the "literary aspects" of the Internet such as accessing banks of relevant stored information, still elude me to a great extent.

Communicating with Your Partner:

Unfortunately, my prospective partner was unable to get hooked up to the Internet, and as a result, we never hooked up either. Instead, I relied on the program director and trainer as my advisors and confidants.

Receiving Support to Conduct your Research:

I appreciated the e-mail updates, opportunities for live chat time, technology tips and occasional telephone conversations. I especially appreciated the program director's visit to my site on April 15. I used that opportunity to discuss my project and to get some additional technical training. I think programs participants would benefit from a second opportunity to meet and discuss. I suggest scheduling three regional meetings at which participants within the designated regions could share their projects and discuss their concerns in person.

Implementing Your Project:

Planning for the orientation module concluded on schedule at the final staff development session on January 30. The orientation module was implemented on February 5 and 6. Student feedback to the

orientation was compiled from February 12 to February 16. Staff meetings held on February 27 and 29 were dedicated to discussing the content and impact of the orientation module.

Data Collection Methods:

During and after the orientation module I collected data from students and teachers in various manners. Students completed a written evaluation and each teacher engaged his/her class in discussions about the impact of the student orientation. The goal clarification activity and the time management activity required follow-up exploration and discussion by teachers and students.

Evaluating the Results of Your Research:

This research provided critical information in three areas:

- 1) a clearly articulated program philosophy - Students commented that they were clear about The Lighthouse's approach to adult education as it was presented in the orientation module.
- 2) the clarity of purpose for enrolling in an adult education program --- motivation, goals and time management - In general, we observe that the adult students from the West Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia whom we serve have traditional notions of education in which they are passive receptors of knowledge. We also observed that students have weak or undeveloped skills and habits regarding independent study. Consequently, I believe we overestimated how much we could accomplish inasmuch as motivation, goals and time management are concerned.
- 3) the importance of collaborative nature of class work - New students responded with enthusiasm as they observed teams of continuing students present work projects which they had completed the previous semester. New students commented that they felt encouraged to participate and succeed in classes after observing people like themselves demonstrate their accomplishments.

Identifying Unexpected Outcomes:

One unexpected outcome was an initial lack of enthusiasm for the project by a few teachers. I believe one reason for this was fear of experimenting with something new.

Looking Ahead, Conducting Future Research:

I would be interested in conducting further classroom research. In fact, I have already concluded a second cycle of research, beyond the expectations of the project.

Summary of Project #2

Author: Susan Cowan
Project Connect
137 N. Beeson Avenue
Uniontown, PA 15401
(412) 437 - 6050

Position: Teacher/Researcher

Type of Class Setting: Job Readiness - Classroom

Levels of Instruction: Multilevel

Research Question(s):

Will the introduction of computer training with selected reading software, paired with one-on-one tutoring, cause literacy students to achieve a two grade increase in tested reading rate quicker than traditional methods and would the use of these computers to teach reading foster an increase in computer literacy in students and tutors?

The Application Process:

I applied to participate in the Online project because of my interest in Internet technology, the rural geography and isolation of Fayette county and my feeling that such training in the Internet would be a valuable skill for me to have.

The Selection Process:

I feel that my access to the necessary hardware, technology and my geographic location were major factors in my being selected for this project. I also feel that, the great interest I expressed in my telephone interview was instrumental in my being selected as a participant.

The Initial Training:

The technology training I received was extremely valuable. Until December, 1995, when I was trained, I had no working knowledge of the Internet. I would suggest an extra day of training so that more time could be spent developing a research question. Perhaps partners could be assigned on the second day of training instead of afterwards so that relationships could begin to develop immediately face-to-face.

Becoming a Researcher:

I found the initial stages of the action research process to be a little frustrating. The main reason for this was, that there is so much information out there on the net, that it was very hard to narrow down all of your ideas to a workable topic. Now, six months into the process, I am much more comfortable with the work.

Determining Your Research Question:

Determining the research question, for me, was the hardest part of the project. There are so many real needs that could be addressed when you are working with adult education. What helped me most during this period was communication with my partner and the three way chat with Jaclyn and my

partner. The group charts were great, it really helped to exchange ideas with everyone.

Using Technology in a New Way:

My comfort level with technology has increased 100%. I now feel very confident that I can continue to work and "surf" the Net independently and figure out most of what I would need to know. I also know how to access Online support when I do get lost or confused.

Communicating with Your Partner:

I found my experience with my partner to be the most positive part of the project. I feel that I have made a new friend and have enjoyed communicating with her throughout the project. We plan to remain in touch via the Net even after the project ends.

Receiving Support to Conduct your Research:

The project director and trainer were very accessible during the project. An earlier start would have been beneficial and an extra day of training would have helped. We needed to do more brainstorming at the onset when we were all together.

Implementing Your Project:

Implementing the project was a fifteen step process that included developing a topic, researching options, recruiting tutors, conducting training, and pre and post testing of students. I received a great deal of support from my supervisor, education staff members, Penn State, and many others.

Data Collection Methods:

I collected data by: administering a pre and post test to student participants and by designing and administering two surveys to tutors participating in the project. I chose this data because I wanted to see a tested two grade level increase in reading level and an increase in perceived computer literacy with tutors and students as measured by surveys, observations and personal interviews.

Evaluating the Results of Your Research:

From the surveys, I learned that there is a great interest in technology. Mature people who have not had the opportunity to work with computers are very interested in acquiring technology training in order to compete in the job market. There was a definite increase in self-confidence after the 10 hours of instruction was completed. At the end of the 10 hours all of the tutors felt comfortable with the software and confident of their ability to use the materials provided.

I have not post-tested my literacy students yet. I want them to get as much instructional time in as possible with the reading software before I post-test.

Summary of Project #3

Author: Pamela Hagen
Adult Enrichment Center of IU 13
31 South Duke Street
Lancaster, PA 17602

Position: Teacher/Researcher

Type of Class Setting: ESL - Classroom

Levels of Instruction: Intermediate

Research Question(s): Are student directed pair groups effective in developing better communication skills for the individual student?

The Application Process:

My only expectation was that I would learn more about computers and how to get about online. I was completely unfamiliar with the term Online Action Research and what it involved, other than going online.

The Selection Process:

I suppose I was selected because I volunteered and had the necessary equipment to go online.

The Initial Training:

I thought our online instruction at the IU was excellent. I really learned a lot in a short period of time through the hands-on approach. The reference notebooks were excellent, too. I learned so much at the computer workshop that I needed to refer back to something to recall all the material covered in the session. The manual also contained additional resource information that I used later when I was ready for it. I found the manual was comprehensive enough to answer most of my questions.

I see only one area that could use improvement. Partners should be assigned prior to the training so they can immediately pair, work on their research questions and develop a rapport that could carry over to the online chats.

Becoming a Researcher:

I wasn't quite sure how to go about evaluating my project. I felt I needed some empirical proof that the project was "working." I was concerned about the amount of time it would take from my class and how my students would feel about filling out forms and being guinea pigs.

I think action research is a valuable aid in learning to be more reflective of our practice and in evaluating our methodology and how we impact our students' learning. The reflection process helped me identify the real issue and examine it to understand why I was satisfied or dissatisfied rather than just throw out the exercise or technique simply because I didn't think it worked.

Determining Your Research Question:

I was fortunate in that I had several ideas for a research question and my question was formulated at the training session with the help of our Trainer. When I first declared my research question to my partner, I received no real feedback. My main regret is that I couldn't have been online more with the

group chats because of previous obligations and technical problems. I suggest more opportunities for chats, something like the forums, where certain hours on certain days might be posted for drop-in chats with any of the participants.

Using Technology in a New Way:

My comfort level with technology has REALLY increased. I am doing research I would never have done without this instruction and gradual introduction. The Internet has opened a new world to me. Every time I go on the Internet, I find a new resource or reference site. It's very exciting and has made research and communication with others of similar interests accessible to me for the first time. We are now permanent subscribers.

Communicating with Your Partner:

My problem was feeling comfortable with my partner online. It was awkward to develop a rapport online. Participants need to learn how to respond online to encourage each other in their projects. "That sounds good" is a conversation ender not encouragement. In what feels like an artificial setting, partners working on the same type of project may do very well. It may be more difficult when people are working on unrelated projects. I think unlimited partnerships might work better, with several people communicating on a weekly basis.

Receiving Support to Conduct your Research:

The project director and trainer were always there if I had a question. I don't have any suggestions for improvement other than more opportunities to set-up group chats.

Implementing Your Project:

Before I began the project, I told my students that I was doing research on pair learning and that they were the project. I asked them to fill out a survey to see what they thought about various teaching techniques and if they liked working with partners and in small groups.

For three months, most class periods had one designated student pair activity with lasted about 30 minutes. At the end of the activity, student questionnaires were completed.

I would circulate around the room observing the interaction of the pair groups. Each day I would tabulate the students' evaluations and reflect on what I saw as compared to the feedback they had given me. I would write those findings in my journal.

Data Collection Methods:

Data was collected via the surveys, observations and my journal entries. During the whole process, I would go online searching for resources to help me determine how I should assess my students' activities and what I should be looking for in determining the effectiveness of student directed pair learning.

Evaluating the Results of Your Research:

Through observation, I know my students have more opportunity to speak English in pairs, that they do help each other more than I could on a daily, individual basis and that the English spoken in pair activities is less rote and more explanatory than I could ever hope to achieve on an individual basis. The student feedback indicated that the vast majority of participants think they are learning new material and improving their pronunciation through pair learning. This project has served to confirm the effectiveness of pair directed groups in developing communication skills and make me more aware of the positive and negative aspects of pair learning.

Summary of Project #4

Author: Sue Klopp
Dauphin County Prison
501 Mall Road
Walnut Bottom, PA 17111
(717) 558 - 1100 x 3220

Position: Teacher/Researcher

Type of Class Setting: ESL - Classroom

Levels of Instruction: Multilevel

Research Question(s): What can I learn about tutor training from looking at current research and collecting data from tutors, students and colleagues that will help me design a tutor training manual to be used in my work site?

The Application Process:

My supervisor applied for me to be a part of this project. When she told me she had "volunteered" me for the project, my first reaction was that it would be very time consuming. I had strong reservations about my ability to find the time to do the project in my already tight schedule.

The Selection Process:

As I recall, the project administrators wanted to have a diverse group of people, representing a wide range of ESL providers across the state. As a prison instructor with open-entry, open-exit, multi-level classes, I probably represented a rather unique view. I believe that the availability of the hardware needed to participate was another factor which was considered.

The Initial Training:

Establishing relationships with the project participants and making a start at becoming a cohesive unit was, for me, one of the major benefits of our training. For me, the most valuable part of the training was motivational. Although I had been reluctant to participate in this project at the beginning, I came away very motivated and eager to get started.

I do have a few suggestions for the future. I would have to say that the Internet training was much too brief for a novice such as me. I do not think I would have managed to get started quite as well as I did without additional outside help from my son.

Group cohesion could be improved though more live chats and another group meeting at mid-point. This might have been a good way to give and receive feedback from more than one person on a regular basis.

Becoming a Researcher:

Although I had identified certain problems in my practice, I was not always motivated to spend the time necessary to find solutions and to implement them, especially since correcting the problems I was dealing with would require me to do a lot of work at home on my own time. Once I had enlisted in the project, I was committed to talking some of these problems and finding solutions no matter how much

work was required. Three factors caused me to undertake and to carry through on this endeavor:

1) support, 2) accountability, and 3) the necessity of meeting deadlines. Although these three factors may be eliminated when this project ends, I believe I will continue to conduct action research on my own.

Determining Your Research Question:

Since there were so many problems for me in dealing with open entry/ open exit/ multilevel classes, I needed to choose a question that would address a major problem in my classes. The first question I chose was relatively easy to solve with a little research: "What changes can I make in the organization of my classes so that class will begin more smoothly?"

Once I had initiated those changes, I was able to concentrate on a more major question-- that of tutor training.

Using Technology in a New Way:

Before the onset of this project, I had never used the Internet. I probably would not have realized the potential of this powerful means of conducting research if I had not been enlisted in the online project. I am now able to keep in touch with the latest developments in ESL practice and to have my questions answered through communicating with other practitioners and listservs. I have also gained knowledge about many other issues which I can apply to my teaching or which will enhance my development as a teacher, issues such as how to teach certain grammar points, how American teacher behavior is perceived by students of other cultures, how to organize a computer lab or how to subscribe to an electronic ESL journal.

Communicating with Your Partner:

Working with a partner was valuable to me in two major ways. First, my partner was a source of encouragement. Both by example and by exhortation, she helped to keep me on track, especially when I became frustrated by various situations. Secondly, having a partner with whom I was supposed to communicate on a regular basis made me accountable. I had to keep working on my project so I would have something to communicate to her. One difficulty I had was that it was hard to really zero in on her project and give her specific assistance at the same time I was struggling to find time to work on my own project. I believe that the mentor/researcher relationship would be easier to maintain because then both correspondents would be concentrating on the same project.

Receiving Support to Conduct your Research:

Both the project director and the trainer gave excellent support. Jaclyn's responses to my journal entries were particularly encouraging, as was Sandy's assistance in formulating my question and the revision of my question. The live chats were very stimulating and helped to give us a sense of camaraderie, incentive to match the other participants' progress, and various leads on sources of information. My only criticism is that it would have helped if we could have started on our projects earlier, so that we would have had a longer time to work on them.

Implementing Your Project/Data Collection Methods:

I used the following methods to collect data: researching the ERIC database to look for other ESL tutor-training programs; writing letters to tutor-trainers in various parts of the country asking for suggestions or copies of their manuals; analyzing several videos of my teaching; analyzing cassette recordings both of my one on one sessions with various students and of my tutors' sessions with students; reading and analyzing student and tutor journals; as well as keeping a journal myself of daily observations;

interviews with tutors and various staff; and corresponding with tutor-trainers on the Internet.

Evaluating the Results of Your Research:

An analysis of the data I collected in this project has yielded a wealth of material which is currently being incorporated into a tutors' manual and training program.

1) From the ERIC material I learned that many programs provide a lengthy training period before matching students and tutors and that many peer tutoring programs provide a system of rewards and certificates. 2) In San Quentin Prison, the tutor inmates are being asked to make a commitment of 18 weeks. At the end of 18 weeks of training, they are asked to find a "co-learner" to partner with and practice techniques with. I have decided to make my training more intensive and to seek ways to reward my tutors. 3) The videos revealed that taking a beginning lesson in another language gives the prospective tutor a very realistic idea of what is involved in learning English. 4) Student journals revealed that they appreciated it when tutors seemed to know what they were doing and got right down to work. 5) Listening to cassette recordings gave me the idea of selecting various recordings to demonstrate methods of teaching, as well as using them to train tutors to hear and correct mistakes in pronunciation and grammar.

Summary of Project #5

Author: Susan Finn Miller
International English Training for Adults
238 North George Street
Millersville, PA 17551
(717) 871 - 0911

Position: Teacher/Researcher

Type of Class Setting: ESL - Classroom

Levels of Instruction: Intermediate and Advanced

Research Question(s): How does instructor feedback impact student learning and/or student perception of learning?

The Application Process:

From the first moment I heard about this project, I was excited about participating. I had a sense of the enormous potential this kind of technology could bring to ESL practitioners as well as to students. I hoped the project would include regular communication with another ESL practitioner or someone who was interested in ESL.

The Selection Process:

I believe I was selected because I have access to the hardware and because I was interested in getting involved.

The Initial Training:

The technology training was very thorough; however, I believe most of the participants could have benefited from having more time to practice with computers. The training on how to do practitioner research was well organized and well presented, but I think we needed more time. There wasn't nearly enough time to consider research questions, and I think people felt rushed. Something that might be helpful as part of the training is to work through the entire research process using a hypothetical (or actual) example.

Becoming a Researcher:

I honestly didn't understand that reflecting on my practice and trying to come up with a specific question was part of the "action research." I thought I wouldn't begin the "research" until I actually started to collect some kind of data. I now see myself as a natural researcher since reflecting on my practice is as normal as breathing for me. Because of this project, I more deeply respect the work teachers do on a daily basis to improve their practice. I am grateful to have been given a supportive structure to look more critically at my own work.

Determining Your Research Question:

When I first began to consider what I wanted to research, I knew I wanted to focus on some aspect of feedback. I define feedback as information given to students about their production of English, be it written or oral, positive or negative. I always seem to have questions about explicit correction of errors: when to do it, how to do it, whether to do it. When I corrected learner errors, is it really helpful or do students just think it's helpful? Does explicit correction or errors help learners in their acquisition of their second language?

Using Technology in a New Way:

I've definitely increased my confidence with using technology. I haven't had as much time as I would like to explore the Internet. What I've found especially helpful is my connection to TESL-L. While this listserv sends a tremendous amount of mail I enjoy reading items of interest when I have the time. I have begun keeping files of pertinent postings and will definitely use them in my future research. In addition, I have had the opportunity to post to the list a few times myself, and have received personal responses from around the globe.

Communicating with Your Partner:

I think the benefits of working with a partner far outweigh any problems. However, it is clear to me that we needed some guidance from our project facilitators as to how to proceed with this communication and how best to provide feedback to each other. I think it would be helpful to provide a format for getting acquainted with one another and the details of our work. I understand the benefits of matching different kinds of practice (teachers and administrators) but I think matching people who do similar kinds of work has obvious positive advantages. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that some of the strategies for looking at data utilized in PALPIN may be workable here. This could be done through e-mail and/or during real time chats.

Receiving Support to Conduct your Research:

I received enormous support through many dialogues with facilitators both in person and online. In addition Jaclyn came to my class to facilitate a focus group for this project. I think Pam's idea to have a regular data and time set up for a question and answer forum online is brilliant.

Implementing Your Project:

I implemented this project in my advanced ESL class of fifteen students using the following steps:

1) Check students' comprehension of my feedback; 2) Check students' perceptions of listening to their own voice on tape, comparing their voice to mine, tape recording an assigned reading; 3) Ask students what specific areas of their speech they have tried to change and how successful their attempts have been using a questionnaire and also a focus group.

Data Collection Methods:

I was interested to learn what specific things learners found helpful about using audio-tapes for pronunciation work, so I formulated questions for learners to respond to which I hoped would give me answers. I asked students to respond to specific questions in writing and by conversing with me on their tapes. I also included a focus discussion group which was led by Jaclyn.

Evaluating the Results of Your Research:

I think I can conclude from this study that using audio tapes for English pronunciation is a useful teaching/learning strategy because 1) it gives the teacher another opportunity to inform learners of the structure of the English phonetic system; 2) it gives learners the opportunity to learn self-monitoring skills; 3) this kind of personal interaction can build rapport between the researcher and the student; 4) the teacher can provide both positive and constructive feedback to the student in an unobtrusive way; 5) noticeable improvement in pronunciation builds learners' confidence; 6) this kind of strategy offers a meaning-focused listening opportunity for students; and 7) the students usually enjoy it and find it helpful in very specific ways.

Identifying Unexpected Outcomes:

Unexpected, yet interesting experiences with two learners caused me to think more deeply about this particular method of providing feedback. One student resisted making tapes all year because he felt very uncomfortable with the process. Another student became very frustrated with what she perceived as her lack of progress in pronunciation.

Looking Ahead, Conducting Future Research:

Participating in this project has been one of the most rewarding experiences I've had as a teacher. Being given a deliberate structure to look critically at what I already do naturally has enlivened my practice enormously. The main reason, I believe, is because of the network of colleagues I've had to reflect with me about my work. I would strongly encourage any practitioner to get involved in this kind of ongoing, process-oriented professional development.

Summary of Project #6

Author: Eunice Rush-Day
Indian Valley Opportunity Center
201 Main Street
Souderton, PA 18964
(215) 723 - 5430

Position: Teacher/Researcher

Type of Class Setting: ESL - Small Group

Levels of Instruction: Multilevel

Research Question(s): What is going on in IVOC's ESL classroom that encourages many students to re-enroll term after term?

The Application Process:

I applied to be a part of this project because I knew next to nothing about the Internet and was interested in learning more about it. I joined PAACE in 1995, and attended my first conference in that year. I was excited about the quality of workshops presented, and especially one by IU 13 that briefly demonstrated the Internet. I became interested in the ESL Program Division and in building relationships with others in the state in this field.

The Selection Process:

I believe I was selected to participate in this project because I work in the field of ESL in a PDE funded program in the greater Philadelphia area and have the technology to enable me to go online. I also wasted no time in submitting my application and in following up on my interest with a phone call.

The Initial Training:

I have very good feelings about the initial project training I received. The entire application process, the notification of selection for participating the project and all logistical information pertaining to the training was superlative. Agendas were explicit, sufficient time was provided for breaks and socialization and training sessions were well planned and presented. The only suggestion I would have concerns the partner selection process. Perhaps a bit more time could be spent in personally mulling over ideas for action research projects prior to partner selection. Maybe partner selection could be done with more participation from project facilitators about a week or so after the training.

Becoming a Researcher:

I was both energized and nervous about becoming a researcher. I was excited at the prospect of stepping outside the normal ways of doing things and looking at them in a new light, yet I was apprehensive about how I would do this as a coordinator with no regular contact with ESL students in the program. Due to technological glitches, I felt better about being a researcher during the last third of the project because the surveys and the interviews I had conducted included a lot of material for thought and a lot of information to share with the instructors regarding students' perspectives on our ESL program. I

think I will continue to do action research whether or not I am formally involved in a project.

Determining Your Research Question:

I went into the trainings with a general idea of a research question which was "What can we do to make our ESL classroom program better?" During the training, one of the facilitators suggested I look at the issue in a more positive light, such as "Why do some students keep coming back to our ESL program term after term?" The group chats were helpful in formulating my final research question which is, "What is going on in IVOC's ESL classroom program that encourages many students to re-enroll term after term?"

Using Technology in a New Way:

It is certain that my comfort level with technology has increased immensely as a result of this project! I was a computer skeptic a few years ago, and found online language completely foreign just six months ago. Access to the Internet greatly increases the ability to do research. There are many interesting and pertinent articles to read, and the ability to communicate with others in the field is invaluable.

Communicating with Your Partner:

I experienced frustration in communicating with my partner. Due to technical difficulties, we both had trouble communicating online at first, so we attempted phone calls. I had an invitation form another participant to share with her, but I never pursued this officially with the facilitators. My loss.

Support to Conduct your Research:

The Project Director and Trainer were both very supportive and encouraging throughout the project. However, due to things going on in my life, I would have found it helpful to have had periodic phone calls, perhaps monthly phone calls. I feel more accountable to a human voice than to a computer screen.

Implementing Your Project/Data Collection Methods:

I started implementing the project by thinking about the questions I had about how students might be feeling about our program. I also looked at the PDE Student Intake and Exit forms to see what types of information the state requires of us in the way of reporting. I looked at student surveys from other programs, and at assorted surveys we had formerly done at IVOC. I talked with six ESL instructors at IVOC and with the Executive Director to let him know a little about the EL Online Project and what I had in mind as a research question. After all this, I composed a student survey and tape recorded students in the advanced classes talking about their classes.

Evaluating the Results of Your Research:

Students said the leading reason for studying English was to gain the ability to talk to Americans. The next most frequently ranked item was learning English to get a job or get a better job. Only one person thought their class was too large, and three thought their class was too small. The taped conversations moved in the direction of students sharing coping skills and provided information about IVOC's ESL program. Much of the data mirrored the information on the student survey forms.

Identifying Unexpected Outcomes:

I guessed that issues of family and personal enrichment or of improving job or educational status in this country would be the most frequently cited reasons for studying English. I was surprised to see that the desire to communicate with Americans was the reason ranked as a major priority by so many students.

Looking Ahead, Conducting Future Research:

I would be interested in continuing practitioner research. I would recommend participation in this project to my colleagues, but I would want them to be fully aware of the time commitment involved.

Summary of Project #7

Author: Linda Wolfson
Volunteers in Teaching Alternatives
8 East Court Street
Doyelstown, PA 18901
(215) 345 - 8322

Position: Administrator/Teacher/Researcher

Type of Class Setting: ESL - Individual

Levels of Instruction: Multilevel

Research Question(s): Will students at the Center who use support services have better attendance than those at the Center who do not?

The Application Process:

Last year at the Drexel Conference, I learned about the Action Research project in California and met Sandy Strunk who told me about the ESL online Project. I thought this would be a wonderful way for our agency to access the Internet and I liked the idea of corresponding with other professionals in the field without leaving my office. I thought it could be easy to learn the uses of America Online and, at the same time, I could get practice in formulating inquiry questions.

The Selection Process:

I believe I was selected because I manage a department in literacy and ESL is a growing population at VITA. I work full time and I have use of a computer at VITA. In addition, I had some familiarity with American Online. I had an idea for a research question which I was interested in from the beginning.

The Initial Training:

I regret I was unable to participate in the initial training in Lancaster. The notebook I received from the training was useful and I did refer to it on several occasions.

Becoming a Researcher:

I began the Action Research and Practitioner Inquiry projects concurrently. I felt this was beneficial because I was able to compare the two approaches and saw their strengths and limitations. I think VITA's future projects will be helped by what I learned in the Action Research process. The formal structure imposed by action research may be used in evaluating new ABE and ESL tutor training curricula.

Determining the Research Question:

This was probably the hardest part of the project: formulating a question that would stand the test of time. I began with a question about retention and then narrowed my focus on the collaboration between staff at the Bristol Family Center and my agency as it related to the three ESL groups run by volunteers from VITA.

Using Technology in a New Way:

I love the idea of accessing people and information through the computer. Not only was I able to communicate with my partner, but I found use for e-mail while working on my research project. I was able to contact a volunteer tutor and send her and receive information from her in a way that would not have been possible without e-mail.

Communicating with Your Partner:

I thought communicating with a partner would be the easiest part of the project, but actually, it turned out to be the most difficult. We each had different schedules and trying to keep up to date with what was happening was harder than I thought. I think I spend equal amounts of time with the Project Trainer as I did with my partner; I was confused about to whom I should be directing my attention. I liked the project my partner was working on and will be interested in the final results of her research. I think there was not enough time for us to really understand each other's project.

Receiving Support to Conduct Research:

There were two issues to consider in answering this question. The first is one of technology. It would have been helpful to have a text on America Online. I got one at the library and it was worthwhile to go through, but I really needed it throughout the project. The second issue is research. I think there was too much delay in responding back and forth by e-mail to each other's project. The Trainer tried to help me clarify my thoughts about my research project but I don't know if it was helpful or not. I struggled with the actual question as I collected data. Working through the process and not being overly concerned about whether I was following the guidelines of the project was helpful in the end.

Implementing the Project:

The focus of my attention was the collaboration at the Bristol Family Center. The Center began operations in September. From the beginning, tutors filled out attendance sheets to keep track of the students. They also indicated the content of each lesson. Each month tutors sent in attendance of students. Tutors communicated regularly with the Program Supervisor by phone because of the newness of the situation. Attendance was compared with services used to see if there was a relationship to number of services and commitment to English classes.

Data Collection Methods:

Quantitative research data was collected to measure attendance and find the number of services students used at the Center. Qualitative data was collected in the form of dialogue journals and phone interviews.

Evaluating the Results of Your Research:

I learned that the use of support services doesn't mean better attendance. There was no direct relationship between individuals who make considerable use of support services and attendance. Students who did not attend groups regularly used a greater range of services. This information will be helpful in planning future programming at the Center.

Identifying Unexpected Outcomes:

In following the course of collaboration with the Bristol Family Center, certain problems became evident. There was confusion in channels of communication between Center staff and VITA staff, Center staff and tutors, and Center staff and students. This frustrated everyone. Groups were formed with no closure or specific goals. Students were asked for their input, but according to the tutors, students had few ideas or wanted the teacher to decide. Much time was spent in support of volunteer tutors who were hurt and upset when students didn't show up and more importantly, didn't call to cancel.

Looking Ahead, Conducting Future Research

I felt my project was one of Practitioner's Inquiry rather than Action Research. I would still like the opportunity to complete an Action Research Project and I think it would be helpful to do so within an organized professional network.